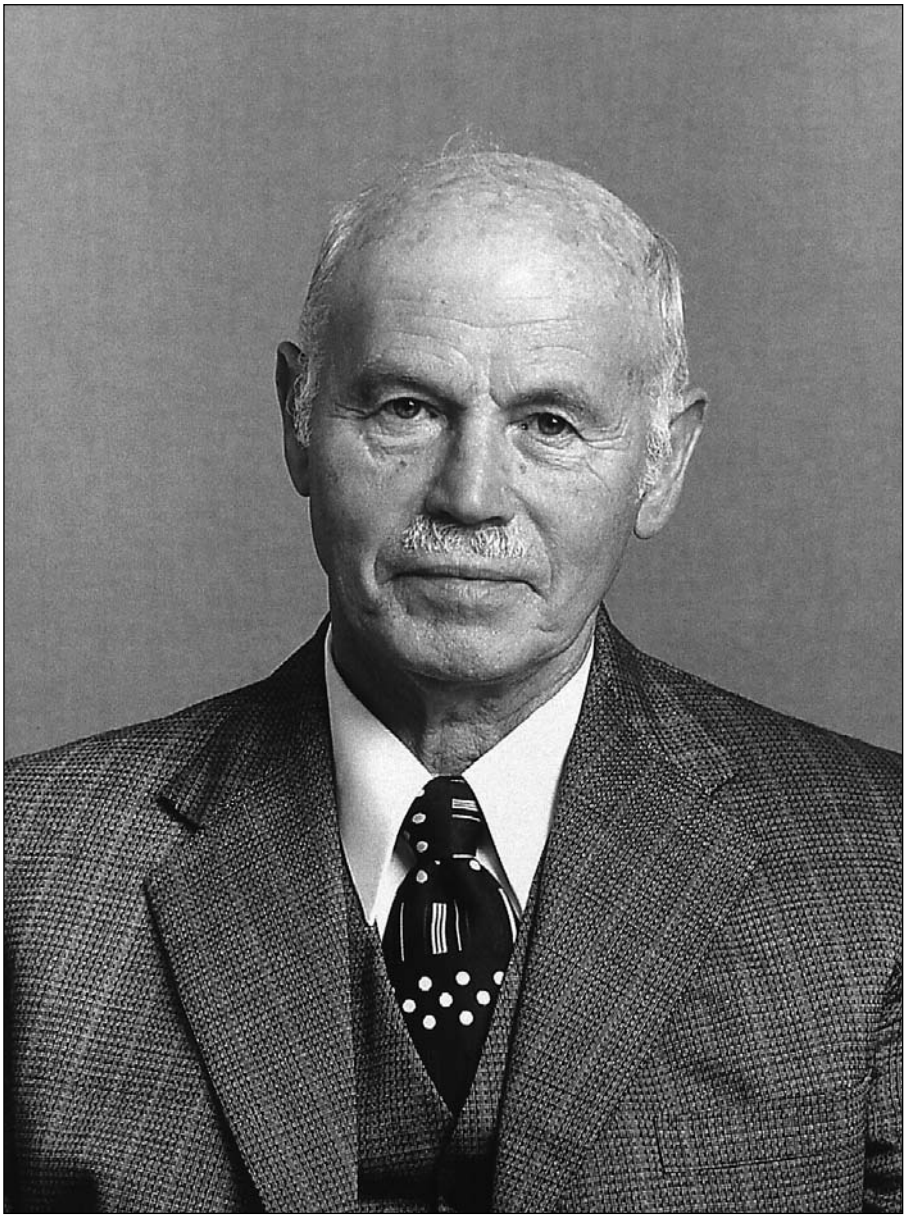

PORTALS OF MEMORY

Sydney Seeff

Compiled by
Joyce Levin and Con Pakter

In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that I record the unexpected passing of my brother Morris on 20 January 1998, corresponding to 23 Tevet 5758, at eight o'clock in the evening. I suddenly felt all alone and orphaned. My heart goes out in grief to the whole family, especially Dora who was his devoted life's companion for almost fifty-five years.

Morris was not only my brother, he was my closest friend. We were constant companions and partners in business for sixty-six years. From our earliest childhood we experienced life together in all its exciting diversity.

ברוך דין אמה

Baruch dayan emet

may his precious and exceptional *neshoma* rest peacefully in Hashem's eternal mercy

Acknowledgements

I must pay tribute to my niece Joyce Levin – daughter of Morris and Dora – whose unflagging efforts and great patience have made the production of this volume possible. She has worked loyally and conscientiously to compile and shape it. *Kol hakavod* Joycie!

I am grateful to my old friend Con Pakter for the many times he has come to my rescue. He is both erudite and diligent in what he does. Con worked for many months helping me to place on record the events of my life and career.

I thank Suzanne Belling who kindly edited the manuscript and gave some very valuable assistance. Percy Elk gave his help when I needed drawings of my house in Krakenowo.

I am indebted to my dear wife Naomi for her patience during the period of writing this volume. I thank my daughter-in-law Ingrid who helped with the preparation of the book for publication.

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Introduction

The mansion of my memory has seven portals. Let us enter and look around.

1. Seven is a holy number in Hebrew:
   - The Torah begins with a sentence that has seven words and its letters are a fourfold multiple of seven.
   - The Almighty created the universe in seven days or seven periods.
   - The creation is described in the Torah in seven paragraphs.
   - The Almighty rested on the seventh day.
   - There are seven days in a week.
   - We observe the seventh day as Shabbat.
   - The Holy Land rests during the seventh year, the *shmittah* year.
   - After seven *shmittah* years the land celebrates a *yovel,* or jubilee year, when all land reverts to the original owner.
   - Judaism has seven festivals.
   - There are seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot.
   - There are seven colours in the rainbow.
   - There are seven notes in music.
   - Holy matrimony starts with seven blessings.
   - Mourning too, is for seven days.
2. I will tell of seven periods in my life:
   - I begin with my Litvak origins. Lithuania was a remarkable Yiddish community. It was in possession of an ancient and noble faith where charity and communal *chessed* were the guiding principles. These lessons have played an important role in my life.
   - My childhood in Russia was marked by material poverty, but spiritual wealth. We were driven out one day into the freezing plains of Russian

exile. We became refugees, or *bezneches*, eking out a miserable living at great risk to life and limb.

- We returned and rebuilt our homes and rose from the ashes.
- I emigrated to South Africa. My two brothers were already living there and my parents and siblings (except for my sister Rivel and her husband Woolf and children) were re-united in 1935.
- After I emigrated I had to fend for myself and establish an economic base. I worked in various jobs until I formed a partnership with my brother Morris.
- Sydmore Engineering (later called Symo) became my life's work. With the help of the Almighty, Morris and I were successful in our business.
- I have enjoyed a wonderful period of semi-retirement. I have travelled overseas many times, especially to my beloved Israel. I have been fortunate to complete my lifetime dream of writing my memoirs; this book.

3. I will attempt to pass on my experiences and the lessons I have learnt to my son, his wife and their children as well as my extended family. When I first began to write this memoir, I confided to my diary: "I shall give the members of the next generation a clear idea of where they came from and what they must strive for." I want them to have both roots and wings. I will add to my own experience from what my parents gave me: useful lessons on both the physical and spiritual level.

4. I am a firm believer in positive thinking. The world has seen great upheavals during my lifetime and I am convinced that there can be peace in the world if people would only think positively and work together. In my opinion, the root of so many difficulties is people's selfish behaviour. I was brought up on the values of charity and *chessed* and have seen the enormous strides one can make if one works positively with others.

5. This book is written in honour of the seven souls who were closest to me in life, and have now passed on to our Maker. They are :
   - My father and mentor Sholem Ze'ev;
   - My saintly mother Chana-Sora;
   - My brother Abe;
   - My brother Harry;
   - My sister Rodel and her son Charles;

- The youngest of us, Nina;
- My sister Rivel who was martyred together with her family in Lithuania by the cruel and barbaric Lithuanians.

  May their departed spirits plead in compassion to the Almighty for our family and its future.

6. This work is also a memorial to the martyrs. They died *al kiddush Hashem* in my little town of Krakenowo in Lithuania as well as in other parts of Europe. Their sainthood and true greatness inspired me. They could not overcome the Nazi tanks and Lithuania's inborn hatred of Jews and Judaism. In the end The "Final Solution" failed – for we are an eternal people – *am Yisrael chai*. Israel is destined eternally for life. This is the Almighty's ancient promise and holy covenant with us.

7. I have witnessed many major events in my lifetime:
   - The Russian Revolution
   - World War I
   - World War II
   - The Holocaust
   - Discoveries have occurred during this century that have changed the lives of millions. I know how to use some of them such as radio, television and driving a motor car.
   - Other great inventions, such as space travel, the computer and Internet are beyond me and I leave their usage to the younger generation.
   - The State of Israel was established in 1948. After 2000 years the Jewish people once again have a country of their own. Israel is very dear to my heart as it is for Jews throughout the world. I feel very privileged to have lived to see such a miracle.

PORTAL ONE

My Shtetl – Krakenowo

Lita-Kovno Gubernia

Jewish communities on Poland's western frontier date from the ninth century and were mainly traders. The number of Jews in this area remained relatively small until the thirteenth century when, as a result of various persecutions in Western Europe, many of them began to migrate eastward towards Germany and Poland.

Poland at that stage was ruled by the Jagiellonian Dynasty (1386–1572) resulting in Poland's political and economical development and subsequent golden age. By the fifteenth century the Poles took over control of Lithuania from the Russians. The Polish policy at the time was to settle this eastern frontier and Polish nobles were given special land grants in Lithuania, which was then inhabited mainly by a poor peasant class. A need existed to create a middle class of merchants. Jews were thus encouraged to settle in Lithuania but not to own land. The idea was to let the Jewish settlers manage the new Polish estates, to collect taxes and to operate various business ventures. As a result the Jewish population was mainly employed as timber merchants, suppliers, shopkeepers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, as well as a few doctors and chemists.They settled primarily in the urban areas.

In the eighteenth century the control of Lithuania reverted to Russian rule. Three great annexations, known as the Partition of Poland (1772–1795), brought hundreds of Jewish communities into the Czarist Empire. Traditionally, Russia had no liking for Jews. To prevent Jews from spreading out into "Holy Mother Russia", a Pale of Settlement was decreed wherein Jewish residence was limited. Permission to live outside its confines was granted only to certain groups, among them doctors, big businessmen and skilled artisans. The borders of this Pale were arbitrarily adjusted from time to time. The Pale consisted of a large zone (one million square kilometres), extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea. In 1882, under the notorious May Laws, Jews were further excluded from additional areas even inside the Pale. Mass expulsions and overcrowding in many places followed. Economic opportunities were denied to thousands of people of the Jewish faith. These laws and the fear of army conscription led to enormous waves of emigration.

Map of Pale of Settlement 1804 – 1917

For the sake of convenience, the newly incorporated territory was divided into regions known as *gubernias.* Most South African Jews, my family among them, came from the Kovno Gubernia in Lithuania, or *Lita,* in Yiddish and Hebrew. Kovno Gubernia was the most northerly region of the Pale of Settlement. The other *gubernias* were Vilna, Grodno and Suwalki. The Belarus area was divided into three *gubernias,* Vitebsk, Minsk and Mogilev. At the end of the nineteenth century about five million Jews lived in the Pale, one-and-a-half million of whom lived in the areas of Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus.

At the time of my birth, 17 August 1909, Lithuania fell under Russian rule. The Russian Empire, ruled by Czar Nicholas II (the last of the Czars), was a vast piece of real estate, stretching from the Baltic Sea in the west to Vladivostok in the Far East. It extended from the frozen Arctic in the north to the high peaks of the Caucasus in the south-west and Mongolia in the south-east.

Emigration from Europe to a new land.

Emigration to new lands

To escape pogroms and persecutions millions of Jews emigrated from Russia to places such as the USA, South Africa as well as to Palestine (First Aliyah). When Russia suffered defeat and humiliation at the hands of Japan, an even more troubled period began. The Pesach pogrom in Kishinev (1903) led to the Second Aliyah to *Eretz Yisrael* and to an enormous exodus wave to overseas destinations, especially North and South America. A total of two million people left Russia between 1881 and 1914.

Family History

Family names

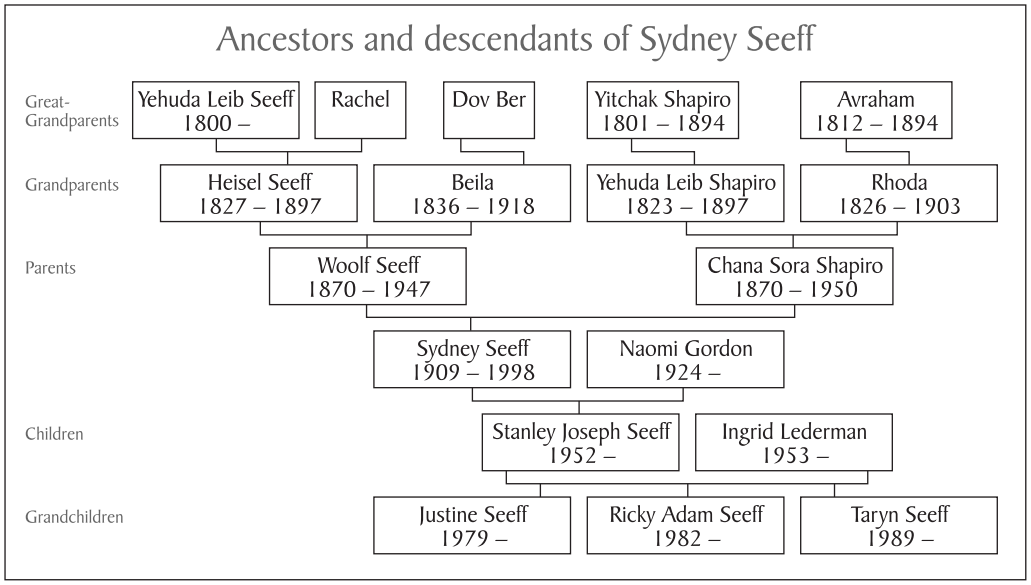
It is quite remarkable that my ancestors, both on the paternal and maternal sides, had surnames which carry the meaning of brightness or brilliance. Let me explain. My great-grandfather on my father's side had the surname Ziv. This is a Hebrew word which means light. On Shabbat morning we sing a most beautiful hymn which joyfully proclaims that the universe is filled with זיו usually translated as "lustre".

Legend has it that after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans, some Jews settled in Persia. The city Pumbeditha was the seat of the Rosh Hagolah or Exilarch. In 900 C E the wisdom of a certain Rosh Hagolah shone out like a shining light. He was learned and wise and was infused with spirituality. He was given the name "Shining Light" or Ziv in Hebrew. All Seeffs, Sieffs, Zives etc. are said to descend from him. The surname Ziv was the way it was pronounced in Yiddish and it was written with a double *vav* at the end. When the family came to South Africa, the English pronunciation and spelling became Seeff.

On my mother's side, the ancestral name was Shapiro. This surname originates from the Hebrew word שפיר which also means bright or illustrious. It occurs several times in *zmirot* we sing on Shabbat and festivals. The first verse of *Yah Ribbon* speaks of *Hashem's* power which we cheerfully and beautifully proclaim.

The sapphire, a precious gem of beautiful, transparent blue, which was set in the breast-plate of the High Priest in the Temple, is directly related to this word.

Family Ties



The recorded history of our family begins with my paternal great-grandfather, Yehuda Leib Ziv. As far as we can ascertain he was born in or about 1800. He and his parents came from Ponevez and settled in Krakenowo in about 1820. He and his wife Rachel were blessed with two sons. The first born was Yehoshua or Heisel (1827–1897) who married Beila bat Reb Dov Ber from an old Krakenowo family. They in turn had four children: Benzion (Benche) who married Chana, Blume Hoda who married Mr Brudne, Sholem Ze'ev (Woolf) who was my father and Yehuda Leib (Louis in English) who married Freidel Brenner.

Yehuda Leib and Rachel's second son was Ben Zion who married Seva. They had eight children, Boris, Rebecca, Rose, Mendel, Chaim Velvel, Maurice, Michael and Sarah. The sons in this family were all shoe-makers and as their parents died young they had to fend for themselves. Even so, many of them, Chaim Velvel, in particular, became a *Talmid Chacham* and was very instrumental in establishing the Yeshiva College in Johannesburg.

Bobba Beila, Heisel's wife was only twelve years old when she got married. She was an orphan and very poor. Her older sister was Sora, whom we called *Mooma Sora*. When they got married, Heisel was studying in the Yeshiva and together they worked very hard to improve their situation and gradually worked themselves to a position of respect.

My great-grandfather on my mother's side was Yitzchak Shapiro, who, I believe, was born in 1805. He and his parents came from Keidan originally and settled in a place called Schliapoberzi, later known as Datnova. His son, Yehuda Leib Shapiro, was a successful merchant who traded in timber, flax, manufactured linen, and also exported geese and ducks to Germany. He married a Datnova lady named Rhoda bat Reb Avraham. Their first born in 1845 was Lipa Benche (Benzion, Benjamin) who later married a woman of great *yichus* (lineage). Her name was Stessie Altshul of Beisegole, a descendant of the well known Altshul family, leaders of the Portuguese Sephardi Jewish community in Oporto. These Jews suffered expulsion some 75 years after the great expulsion of 1492 by Ferdinand and Isabella, and the family gradually moved eastwards towards Lithuania. Stessie and Benche lived in Beisegole and had six children: Victor Avigdor Shapiro, Anna Lipson, Sarah Oppenheim, Fanny Schulkin, Ida Schlein and Dorothy Lieberman. These are, of course, their married names. The family moved to America in 1904 and I had the good fortune of meeting some of them when Naomi and I first visited the United States in 1965. Since that time I have met Victor's family on several other occasions.

My great-grandfather, Yehuda Leib must have been barmitzvah age when Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812. The French garrison passed through Lithuania while in retreat from the Russian army during the severe winter months. It is not known whether French soldiers occupied any houses in Krakenowo during this retreat.

Napoleon retreating from Russia after a disastrous campaign.

My Father's early years

My father, as I have mentioned, was the son of Yehoshua or Heisel Ziv (1827–1897) who married Beila (1836–1918), and was born on Friday, 28 January 1870, corresponding to 26 Shvat 5630. He was the third of four children, Benche (Benzion), Bluma Hoda, Sholem Ze'ev and Leibe (Louis), all born in Krakenowo. His parents were religious and they brought up all their children in that way. At the age of six, my father had already been taught to read and write in both Hebrew and Yiddish. He then learned *Chumash* and later *Tanach* (Bible). Thereafter, he went on to *Talmud* and *Ein Yaacov* which comprises selections from the *Aggada.* He went to *shul* regularly to *daven* three times each day: *Shacharit, Mincha* and *Ma'ariv.*

He participated in sport and was healthy and fit, often swimming in the River Neviazhe. He was strong and brave; and not afraid of the *shkotzim,* or young *goyim.*

When he was older he studied arithmetic and the Russian language which he could speak, read and write. At nineteen he was called up to serve in the Czarist army. As he was fond of music he joined the military orchestra. During his time in the army he retained his Jewish identity and refused to eat the *treif* army food, preferring to eat only kosher. After three years he returned home to Krakenowo.

My Mother's youth

Lipa Benche Shapiro (Benzion, Benjamin) was for many years my maternal grandparents' only child. After his birth in 1845 three other children were born, but they died very young. A quarter of a century went by till Yehuda Leib and Rhoda bat Reb Avraham had another healthy child. On 8 August 1870, cor-

responding to 11 Av 5630 a daughter was born. Her name was Chana Sora, my mother. Her parents were worried about her health, fearing the same fate as their other children. They therefore arranged for Chana Sora to live for some years with good family friends named Cohen who lived near Datnova. (The Cohens also emigrated to South Africa and the two families maintained close ties. Isser Cohen, the son, was more or less my mother's age and Harvey Cohen, his son, is just a bit younger than I am.) When she was about eight years old she moved back to the care of her own parents.

Chana Sora was brought up in a strictly religious home. She was an intelligent young girl and was easily able to master Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. In later years she also studied German.

The 'Shidduch'

My mother grew up to be a beautiful upright young woman and reached marriageable age. At the same time my father completed his army service. Their respective fathers had become friendly and arranged for the two young people to meet. The young couple liked each other, so the two fathers drew up an agreement in Hebrew. Yehuda Leib, my grandfather, was a scholarly gentleman and had an excellent handwriting. It was decided that he should be the scribe of the *kinyan (tnoi'im)*. The agreement *(Kinyan)* was signed by both parents and properly witnessed on Thursday, 26 January 1893, corresponding to 9 Shevat 5653. This information came into my hands by chance when I found the original *kinyan* (shown here) among my father's papers which he stored in a special container, kept in a safe place for many years. The English translation of the document is reproduced from this original copy.

The wedding took place in Schliapoberzi or Datnova, on Rosh Chodesh Adar, corresponding to 16 February 1893. As was the custom in Lithuania, the *sheva brachot* were performed at festive meals in seven different venues.

Copy of the original 'Kinyan' *(Tnoi'im)* between
Sholem Ze'ev Ziv and Chana Sora Shapiro.

With the blessings of the Almighty – *mazaltov*
May this occasion ascend and endure and flourish like a verdant moistened garden. He who finds a woman has found the ultimate good. May this be the will of the good and beneficent Creator, *Hashem.* Thus has spoken the distinguished groom Ze'ev. He will marry the virgin, the lady Chana Sora, the daughter of Reb Leib Shapiro, upon the following conditions that are clarified below:
The bride's father has obligated himself to give his daughter, the bride:

- The amount of 300 silver rubles in cash and to deposit this money with a third party, prior to the wedding. The two sides must both be agreeable to the choice of the third party.
- Clothing and the usual necessities of a household, as is the custom for a Jewish daughter of Israel.
- As is the custom for distinguished and honourable families of a Jewish daughter, all the expenses of the wedding as is customary.

The father of the groom, Reb Yehoshua Ziv, obligates himself to give his son, the groom Ze'ev Ziv and to his bride Chana Sora:

- The support and sustenance pertaining to him, which is one half for the period of five years from the time of the wedding on the aforementioned date onwards an amount equal to a salary.
- And G-d forbid to the contrary.
- Half of the house which is his for five years from the aforementioned date for the domicile of the couple.
- After five years he is obligated to deliver to the couple the amount of their dowry in full, namely the 300 silver rubles mentioned before.
- Clothing for his son, the groom, in accordance with the custom of distinguished members of the community.
- The two parties shall not withhold, prevent or separate and will not hide not this one from the other or the other from this one.

The time of the wedding we establish now on behalf of the groom and on behalf of the bride as being Rosh Chodesh Adar of this year 5653 (Thursday, 16 February 1893). May it come to us for good.

The fine for the transgressor of these conditions against one party that performs and completes these conditions is as is the usual custom.

We made a *kinyan,* a symbolic act of acquisition and obligation with an article of clothing grasped by both parties in a symbolic agreement. This was done not as a presumption without cause and not as graspers of documents. As a proof and as a sign of truth, we have sealed the document on the evening of the Thursday of the portion of the Torah *Beshalach,* in the year 1893, corresponding to the fifth month, 9 Sh'vat 5653 (26 January 1893.) in the village of Schliapoberzi, known as Datnova.

Signed:	Leib ben Reb Yitzchak Shapiro
	Yehoshua ben Reb Yehuda Ziv
In our presence signed:	Mordechai Muller
	Shmuel Leib

Translation of the 'Kinyan' *(Tnoi'im)*

The ‘Din Torah’

My paternal grandfather Heisel had a large house near the market. The house itself was divided into two apartments, the front part being more valuable as it had direct frontage onto the market. Market day was on Thursday. Peasants and traders would come from the surrounding area to trade and sell commodities including grain, potatoes, cabbages, cattle, sheep, poultry, while village shopkeepers would sell manufactured goods such as spades, ploughs, clothing and footwear which were needed by the peasants on their farms. Beer, vodka and other spirits were also traded on these days.

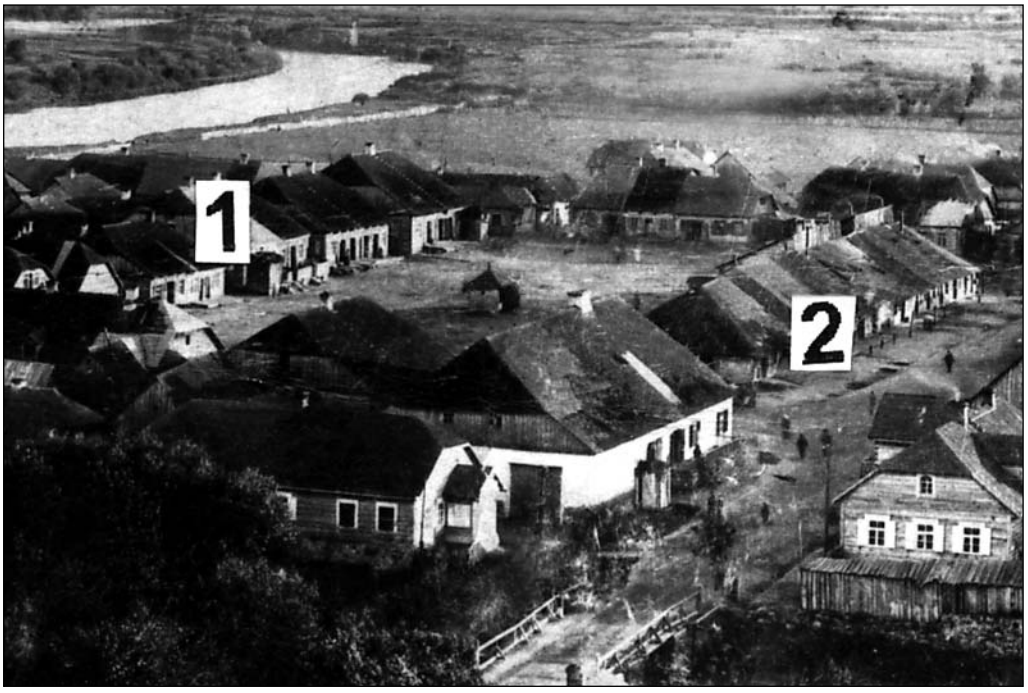
At the time of Heisel’s death in 1896, Louis and his wife Freidel had already emigrated to South Africa. The house thus became the inheritance of the remaining two sons in Krakenowo, Benche and my father. Both brothers laid claim to the front portion of the house.

My father Sholem Ze’ev and his brother Louis had both served in the Czar’s army. (My father, who was musically inclined, played the flute in the military orchestra. Louis also played in the military orchestra.) My father’s enlistment, as well as that of Louis, had exempted the third brother Benche from serving his time.

My father having served this time believed that he was entitled to the more valuable section facing the market. Uncle Benche and his wife Chana, on the other hand, felt they had claim to the front house on the grounds that they had established a bakery and having the front section would enable them to earn a better livelihood. A family argument erupted which had to be finally settled by a *Din Torah*. The Rabbi of Krakenowo, Rabbi Chasdin, a highly respected man, considered the case very carefully. The final verdict ruled in favour of Benche and Chana taking the smaller front section, as they only had one child, a daughter named Pesa Chaya. My father was given the back apartment, which was in fact larger and more suited to a family with children, as it had a considerable backyard and a stable for a milking cow. My parents thus settled down in their new home.

Settling down in Krakenowo

My parents needed to earn a living and so they decided to open a shop. Their portion of the allocated house was not suitable for trading purposes. They investigated and bought a property 50 metres away from their home. The property included a shop which faced onto the marketplace and was ideal for trading on both market and other days. They equipped the shop with the necessary merchandise. It was a general store where housewares, groceries and food products were sold. The customers included Jews as well as farmers and peasants from the neighbouring region.



OUR HOUSE AND SHOP IN KRAKENOWO.
The house is indicated by number 1. Benche's house was in front while our house was at the back. Number 2 indicates the shop.

Both my parents worked in the shop all day, closing only for lunch. My mother was the more dominant participant in the store and did the ordering and most of the selling. My father did all the manual work such as unpacking the goods and bringing the large barrels of herring into the shop. In Russia and surrounding countries sugar was not made from sugar cane which can be finely ground, but from white beetroot. Sugar would be bought in large cones and my father would then break these into smaller segments and make them into parcels of sugar for customers. The shop also had a small *pivneh* (bar/restaurant). Peasants who came to buy their weekly supplies would buy some refreshment as well. I remember a special beverage that my parents served, called *quas.* It was made from old dry fermented bread and tasted much like beer shandy. The local Lithuanian peasants were very fond of this brew.

Sholem Ze'ev & Chana Sora's family

My parents

My father was a very gentle man. He always loved to study, but the pressure of earning a living for his wife and children did not give him much spare time. He was very good with his hands and could make and fix all types of furniture. He worked in the timber industry for some time and was knowledgeable about many sorts of wood.

My mother was a very practical and sensible woman. When my father had to spend time away from home, my mother accepted the reality that she would have to manage the shop as well as look after her family. While we were all young my mother would work and run the household, but as we grew older she allocated various jobs to each of us, especially the girls.

The birth of their first child

My parents were happily married and were thrilled when their *bechor* (first born) was born on 26 January 1895. They called him Avraham Yitzchak (Abe). His name relates to members of my mother's family: Avraham was our grandmother's father's name and Yitzchak was our grandfather's father's name. (See ancestral tree) Another son was born a while later unfortunately the child died while still very young.

At the turn of the century, life was very hard in Lithuania and many people began to look at the possibility of living elsewhere. The problems were manifold. The country itself was poor and it was hard to make a living. Jews were restricted from possessing land and higher education was difficult to obtain. There was also the fear of serving in the Czar's army which could mean twenty years' service. Young males, especially, left the country to escape this dreaded incarceration. At the same time the world was very excited about the gold rush in South Africa. Many Jewish men from Lithuania came to South Africa, the *Goldene Medina*, for short periods to make money and then return home. It was under these circumstances that, soon after Abe's birth, my father travelled to South Africa.

He left Krakenowo in 1896 and worked in Johannesburg in a furniture shop. While my father was away, my mother continued to work in the shop on her own and still managed to look after her children, with her mother-in-law, Bobba Beila's help. On 29 April 1897, my mother's father, Yehuda Leib, passed away. Later that same year my father's father, Heisel, took ill, requiring my father, Sholem Ze'ev, to return home to Krakenowo. He sailed back in late 1897 with the golden British "sovereigns" that he had earned. These were enough to supplement the income received from the family shop. Heisel passed away later that year on 6 September. His widow Bobba Beila came to live with my parents.

Harry is born

A son was born to my parents on Sunday, 18 September 1898, corresponding to second day Rosh Hashana. He was named Heisel Leib (Harry) after the two grandfathers who had recently passed away. Soon after the *yomtavim* of that year, my father returned to South Africa to once more supplement the family income.When the Anglo-Boer War broke out a year later – on the 12 October 1899 – he left the Transvaal for Cape Town. He worked there till the end of 1902 when he sailed home again to his wife and two sons.

The arrival of daughters

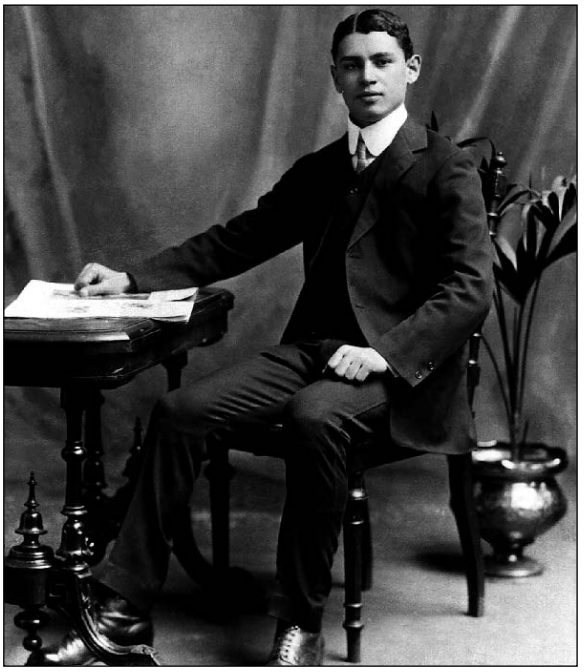
On the 18 February 1903 my maternal grandmother Rhoda died at the age of 67. When my mother gave birth to her first daughter on 15 January 1904, corresponding to 27 Tevet 5664, the child was named Rodel Leah. My second sister Chaia Rivka was born on 15 September 1906, corresponding to 25 Elul 5666. She was affectionately known as Rivel.

My mother, Rivel and Rodel (about 1908).

Abe emigrates to South Africa

Abe was a good student at school and by the age of ten had begun to study Talmud. He continued his education for three years at the local Krakenowo Yeshiva. Unfortunately he had to terminate his studies as our family, like many others in Lithuania, was suffering from economic difficulties.

After Rivel's birth it was my father's intention that the family should emigrate to South Africa. Circumstances prevented him from going either on his own or with his family as he was preoccupied with trying to provide for his growing family. An opportunity, however, occurred for my brother Abe to go in his stead at the end of 1909. Abe was very friendly with Zelig Isaac Levin's two sons, especially the younger, Louis. The family was planning to move to South Africa and so it was decided that fourteen-year-old Abe should travel with the Levin family.



Abe in South Africa

The three youngest children

The last three children born to my parents were not named after any ancestors. I was born on Tuesday 17 August, 1909 corresponding to 30 Av 5669 or Rosh Chodesh Elul, and was simply named Zundel. The Yiddish translation of my name means "sonny" or "sonny boy". Two years later my brother Morris arrived on Wednesday, 12 July 1911, corresponding to 16 Tammuz 5671. His Hebrew name was Moshe and in Yiddish he was known as Maishke.

The last child was regarded as the pearl of our family and so was aptly named Pearl, or Pninah in Hebrew, later abridged to Nina. She was born in Pochinki, Russia, on the fifth day of Chanukah (*finfte lichtel*), 29 Kislev 5678, corresponding to 14 December 1917.

The world into which I was born (1909)

I was born at the beginning of the twentieth century, a century destined to be one in which mankind achieved the greatest scientific and technological progress. It was also to be the century which would witness the Holocaust, gross indignities and crimes against humanity, as well as the emergence of the permissive society. At no time in history did mankind reach simultaneously such great material wealth and such spiritual depravity. As Charles Dickens put it at the beginning of his *Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times".

In the year I was born, Henry Ford mass-produced the "Model T" automobile. This heralded the advent of the motorised vehicle as a universal method of transport. I saw a car for the first time only when I reached barmitzvah age! Over the years I have made up for my poor start in motor car knowledge by learning from my brother Morris who studied and worked on engines at the ORT school[1] in Kovno (1925). I now enjoy driving cars and am always interested in new models.

On the day of my *bris,* the Frenchman Louis Bleriot flew his monoplane across the English Channel from Calais to Dover in 37 minutes. The first sound movie was shown five years before I came into the world. The first television signals were transmitted two decades later. When I was born the world had no missiles, no nuclear bombs, no biological weapons. It was a world without computers or even pocket calculators. Nobody ever dreamed that during my lifetime we would actually behold a man landing on the moon!

[1] The word **ORT** is from the Russian acronym for the Society for Manual Labour or **O**rganisation for **R**ehabilitation through **T**raining. It was initiated by a group of prominent Russian Jews during the reign of the liberal Czar Alexander II (1881)

The relentless hatred of the Jew

The Russian regime actively fostered anti-Semitism as a tool for preserving Czarist rule and kept imposing economic stumbling blocks on Jews. The only work available was shopkeeping, innkeeping or managing estates.

In 1881 when a wave of pogroms occurred in some 160 cities and villages, the government stood aside as Jews were murdered. It was never established if the government had begun the pogroms but soon afterwards it enacted the "May Laws" which further restricted Jewish activities. A few years later Czar Nicholas II actually gave money to the anti-Semitic organisation "Black Hundreds" which was the secret fighting force of the Union of the Russian People, a right-wing organisation which demanded that Jews be excluded from military service and should pay a special tax instead. They also wanted Jewish privileges to be annulled. The "Black Hundreds" were made up of rural roughs as well as lower middle class and they were responsible for the pogroms of 1905. In the same year the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", a virulent anti-Semitic booklet was published under the auspices of the Secret Police with the knowledge of the Czar (who actually believed the work to be a fraud, but it suited his purposes) which greatly influenced thinking in Eastern Europe. In many respects the Union of the Russian People was a precursor of Nazism.

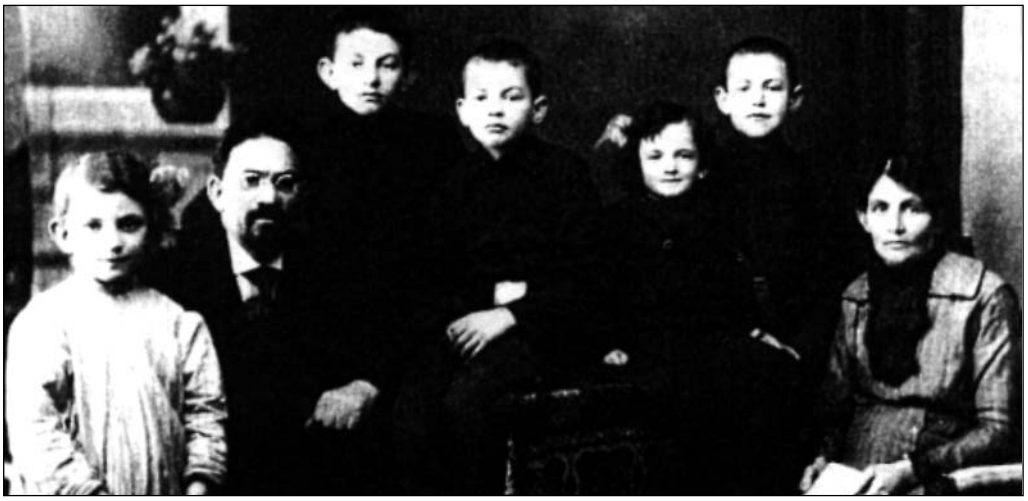
"Black hundreds" marching in Russia

The Beilis trial

When I was four years old, the blood libel trial of Mendel Beilis began in Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine. I was much too young to remember this famous trial. As I grew up, however, I heard the story of the *Beilis Protzes* many, many times. The trial was not a storm in a teacup either. Beilis was not alone; the whole of Jewry stood in the dock, accused of baking matzah with Christian blood! The trial is a fascinating story of a man and a people who were hated and libelled with ritual murder.

On the 20 March 1911, the mutilated body of a twelve-year-old boy was discovered on the outskirts of Kiev, the holy city of Russian Orthodoxy. Without the slightest hesitation, the Czarist press immediately came out with the accusation that the Jews killed him for the use of his blood on Passover, which that year commenced on 12 April. A vast throng of the Russian anti-Semitic "Black Hundreds" attended the boy's funeral and handed out accusatory leaflets. In a very short space of time the whole empire was in an outrage against the "horrible and murderous Jews".

The truth of the matter did not receive the same publicity. The fact is that a few days after the discovery of the child's body, the Kiev police traced the crime to a gang of thieves and a well-known prostitute, but this was not publicised. The Kiev district attorney, a notorious Jew-hater, disregarded the police report. Instead he gave instructions that a Jew should be found upon whom the blame should be shifted. In July 1911, just before Tisha B'Av, a Russian lamplighter testified that on 12 March, the day the child had disappeared, he had passed the brickyard owned by the Jew, Menachem Mendel Beilis. He stated under oath that he had seen the manager kidnap the youngster and drag him towards the brick kiln. Beilis was duly arrested and charged with murder. A Catholic priest confirmed that the death appeared to indicate a Jewish ritual murder. A report of the arrest was immediately submitted to Czar Nicholas II and the news spread like wildfire throughout Russia and the world at large. It made headlines in all major newspapers around the globe. As in the case of Dreyfus in France (1895), world leaders in politics, literature, art and public affairs began to take sides for and against Beilis and the Jews.



The Beilis family.

The trial took place in Kiev and held the world spellbound. The chief Russian prosecutor presented the Jews as enemies of the human race. They were labelled Christ-killers and blood users. The best advocates of Moscow and St Petersburg were hired to oppose this criminal accusation. Under cross examination, the lamplighter and his wife confessed that they had lied to the court as a result of police pressure. The Chief Rabbi of Moscow, Jacob Mazel, proved that the Catholic priest who upheld the ritual murder accusation was completely ignorant of Judaism and Jewish customs. The priest in fact had a criminal record and had been bribed by the prosecution. Beilis was found "not guilty," but the anti-Jewish hostility of Imperial Russia, of course, increased dramatically.

Kiev was far from my little *shtetl*, Krakenowo, but the effects of the trial lingered for many years. My family understood that no Jew was safe from the hideous hatred of Russia against the Jews. The fear of pogroms was particularly felt at Easter. It was a widespread custom to preach anti-Jewish sermons in the churches at this time and to incite the populace to a state of frenzy. The congregants would then stream out of the churches looking to avenge Christian blood. My family and others in our village would stay at home and even hide in cellars and attics to avoid these wild crowds. One of my earliest childhood memories was of my mother trying to protect us children from the horrendous rumours and newspaper reports which might frighten us. She was, may *Hashem* rest her soul, a caring and compassionate mother. She consoled us with a promise that G-d would protect us.

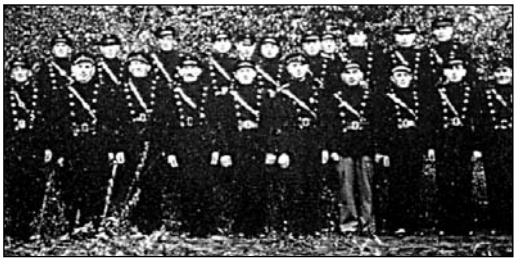
Truth saves the day

My father soon used up the money he had earned in South Africa and needed to find an occupation to feed his family. He became a timber merchant. He bought a portion of a forest from a rich landowner and hired peasants to cut down the trees. The logs were made into rafts which floated down the Neviazhe, along the river Nemen to Kovno and from there they were sent to Germany. The remaining wood was sold for heating local Krakenowo homes.

My father had one particular peasant who worked for him. One day a dispute occurred between my father and the Lithuanian concerning wages. After much argument my father relented and paid the man the extra money he demanded which satisfied the peasant. Some time later a group of Cossacks rode into Krakenowo looking to make trouble. They approached this same Lithuanian and asked him to identify Jewish homes to plunder. The man obliged. However, when he came to my father's house he stopped and told them to leave these people alone as they were honourable and truthful in their business dealings.

The fire brigade

To indicate the ruthlessness of the times, the story is told about the period of Morris's *bris* in 1911. The ceremony had just been completed by Rabbi Chaimowitz when neighbours rushed in to say that a fire had been started by hooligans and some of the public buildings were being burnt. The local fire brigade, the Krakenowo Pazarne Commando, rushed to put out the fire. They had water in *botskas* (barrels) which had to be pumped out with flexible sail-type pipes. My beloved mother was left alone in the house nursing Maishke while the guests went to help with the emergency.



Krakenowo's "Pazarne Commando" (Fire Brigade) circa 1915.

Map of Lithuania

Map showing Jewish communities in Independent Lithuania and in the Vilna region ceded to Lithuania in October 1939.

All the *shtetl* names on the map are the ones used by the Yiddish-speaking population. Spellings and pronunciations differ from region to region.

Krakenowo: The *Shtetl* where my cradle stood

My life began on 17 August 1909, in a little Litvak village or *shtetl* called Krakenowo situated on the Neviazhe River. The first Jewish settlement in Krakenowo dates back to 1667 and numbered sixteen families. By 1730 there were already fifty Jewish families living there, totalling two hundred and fifty people. A great fire in 1787 destroyed many of these houses, but the resilient Jewish community set to work to rebuild and repair the damage. When my great-grandparents arrived from Ponevez in 1820, the population numbered three hundred and fifty people. The *shtetl* continued to grow in the nineteenth century and by 1897 there were two thousand one hundred and eighty-seven occupants. Fifteen hundred were Jewish. This number remained unchanged until the outbreak of World War I.

The majority of Jews in Lithuania lived in little towns like Krakenowo. You will see from the map that our *shtetl* was exactly midway between Ponevez and Keidan, 30 kilometres in each direction. Keidan was larger and more modern than Krakenowo, while Ponevez was considered to be a large city. Other large towns were Shavel, Kelm and Tavrig. Kovno (Kaunas) was a very large city, and later became the capital of the Lithuanian Republic. Vilna (Vilnius), the other large city, was the capital of the Vilna Gubernia. The Jewish community of this latter city was considered to be one of the finest in Eastern Europe and it maintained many excellent yeshivot. The great Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Eliyahu (1720-1797), came from there. So enormous was his influence that the city became known as the "Jerusalem of Lita".

The Yiddish term *shtetl* denotes the Jewish community of a small town. It was not, however, a closed world. Around, and often within it, were many non-Jews. Almost every *shtetl* had a *Shabbes goy* who was employed by the Jewish residents to do many of the things the Jew himself was not allowed to do on Shabbat. Another important non-Jewish figure was the *poritz,* the nobleman. These noblemen had inherited vast estates and very often Jews who lived in the *shtetl* would work for the *poritz.* They were his business advisors, managers of

his lands, salesmen for his timber, furs, grain and other products. On market days, and through other business transactions, the Jews and the peasants had a lot to do with one another. They spoke each other's language. The Jews learnt Russian, while some of the peasants learnt Yiddish. My elder sister Rivel knew the Russian language as well as some of its literature. At all times the Jew remained faithful to the Jewish law which forbids cheating a gentile in a business transaction.

My *shtetl* was ringed by large birch forests, which was a popular area for picnics, and many peasant villages and hamlets. Within our little town we felt needed by our fellow Jews and secure in our way of life. The local doctor, however, was not Jewish and lived about three streets away from our house.

The moment we passed beyond the last house on Keidaner Gas, the main road leading to Keidan, we found ourselves in an alien world. There, dogs

Typical wooden house.

would bark at you and rough peasant voices challenged you as a *Zhid,* a Jew who belonged to a different civilisation. This was indeed true and even we, as children, knew it.

Jews had lived in Lithuania for some six centuries. However, in our religious beliefs, cultural values and lifestyles, it was as if we inhabited separate planets. We never mixed socially with the *goyim* and our perceptions of the world were utterly different. Judaism in fact is a civilisation and not merely a faith system. Moreover, the Lithuanians spoke their own strange language. Linguistically it is related to one of the oldest Aryan dialects spoken in India. Its grammar is from Sanskrit. Jewish children who attended local Lithuanian schools were obviously taught in Lithuanian and spoke the language as well as any local gentile.

Famous rabbis of the town included Rabbi Moshe Mishel Lurie who was the local rabbi for fifty years. When my parent married there were two rabbis in Krakenowo. One was Rabbi Chasdin who was the *dayan* for their *Din Torah*. The other was Rabbi Natan (Notela) Lurie, the son of Rabbi Moshe Lurie. He was the local rabbi for thirty-five years and died in 1895. The next rabbi was Rabbi Moshe Raskin who held his post till 1915 when the population was exiled to Russia. During the exile Rabbi Chaimowitz, the local *mohel,* was posted to the same area as my parents. He became both the spiritual leader as well as the *mohel* and *shochet* for the forlorn community. After World War I Rabbi Benyamin Moovske served for fourteen years.

Rabbi Natan (Notela) Lurie.

Life was a struggle

When I was born our little town had a total population of some 2200 citizens, 1500 of whom were Jewish. The community comprised mostly middle income and poor people. There were artisans, blacksmiths, shoemakers, shopkeepers, tailors and wagon drivers. I grew up in an impoverished community where the majority struggled to make a living.

To supplement *parnosse* (livelihood) Jews who had larger grounds were able to become vegetable gardeners. My mother planted potatoes and radishes in our *haif* (yard). I remember a particular Keidaner Jew who used to come to our *shtetl* regularly – he was a tenant farmer all his life. The town of Keidan was famous for its cucumbers, so he became known as Dovid die Ugerke (the Cucumber). This man, like many others, grew cucumbers, cabbage and beetroot in summer and then sold them to the Jews in our village and neighbouring villages. (In winter the same Dovid became a polony manufacturer.)

At the end of summer all the members of the family participated in cutting and slicing the cabbages, cucumbers and beetroot and placing them in large barrels to be preserved for the winter months and even for the early part of summer. The Jewish butchers supplied the community with *heldzlech* which are sheep or cattle entrails, stuffed with mince meat. They also sold chickens, geese and ducks.

Market day in Krakenowo before World War I.

Memories of Krakenowo

A friend of mine and *landsman* from Krakenowo, Joseph Milne, wrote an article in the Krakenowo Jubilee Brochure of 1961, celebrating 60 years of the Sick Benefit and Benevolent Society. He describes what the *shtetl* looked like when he lived there before World War I:

> "The houses in Krakenowo were built of timber logs for protection against heat and cold, and then over-laid with smooth planks of wood to give a smooth effect. The roof was made of shingles. The houses had double windows in order to give protection against the extreme cold, and the inner windows would be removed during the summer. Each window had a shutter with a bar to bolt it from the inside. Only Jews lived in the centre of the village, while the non-Jews lived on the outskirts. The non-Jews had gardens in front of their homes, but they lived in little farm-type houses, none of which could compare with the Jewish homes. Some of the poorer Jews, who could not afford to live in the centre of the village in the main streets, had very small houses with thatched roofs, in small side-streets. Because the roofs were made of shingles and of thatch, there was always the danger of fire. Many villages in Lithuania were almost completely destroyed by fire. After such disasters, communal representatives would be sent from village to village to collect money to assist with the rebuilding of the destroyed place."

Morris and I at a well during a trip to Lithuania in 1992.

The more comfortable Jewish families had their own cow which they kept in a *stahl* in

their *haif* (yard) or they rented a *stahl,* while the poorer families kept a goat. These animals were valued for their milk. In summer, Lithuanian peasants were paid by the wealthier families to herd the animals to graze in the nearby fields, on a daily basis, after milking had been done by the various Jewish owners. The children of the poorer families would do this work themselves. Every evening, they would return the animals for milking to the various families. During the winter months, when grazing was impossible because of the snow, the animals would be given fodder such as hay or lucerne in their barns.

Water carrier.

Most houses in the *shtetl* had a small *keller* (basement) in one corner of the house with a steep staircase leading to the bottom. The *keller* was a cool place and food was stored there as refrigeration had not yet been invented. Families would collect a lot of snow during winter and use it to maintain a cool temperature well into the summer months.

There was no indoor plumbing. The outhouse toilet was made of wood and the buckets were removed regularly. Water had to be brought from the nearby well. There was a large round log around which was wound a rope with a bucket attached at both ends. As the one empty bucket was lowered to scoop up water, the other, which was filled with water, was lifted up. There was a special professional water carrier called a *wassertregger.* He would carry a small flat log, or *nastze,* on his shoulder with one full bucket hanging over each side. These two buckets would be brought to the house and the water would be used very sparingly for drinking, cooking and washing. Poorer families would have to carry the *nastze* themselves.

Charities, societies and Torah institutions

Joseph Milne depicts the various societies which served the community:

> "Amongst these was *Hachnosses Kallah* to enable the poorer girls to marry: We had a *Gemillas Chesed*, for the purpose of granting loans to persons in need, or requiring assistance in business. A fund existed called *Pidion Shuvuim* to provide the means of bailing out a person who had been arrested, or to help the family of an arrested man. This fund assisted men who had attempted to avoid Russian military service, and who had been caught escaping, arrested, and forced to walk back to the village on foot as a punishment. The police would walk such men from village to village, and while they were in our village, we would assist them by replacing their worn out and tattered articles of clothing, worn to shreds in the long enforced march. We also provided them with food for the journey. For the purpose of caring for and visiting the sick, the *Bikkur Cholim* existed. These were but a few of our various societies, established for the welfare of the community.
>
> We had a *Talmud Torah* for the teaching of children whose parents could not afford to pay for their tuition. For this purpose, the village had a special schoolhouse and employed teachers who taught the children *Ivrit, Chumash and Tanach*. Most of the children who attended the *Talmud Torah*, eventually learned one trade or another. Of course, we had our *Chevra Kadisha*, whose voluntary officials gave of their services devotedly and unsparingly. The *Chevra Tehillim* or *Tehillim* Society, a society for the reciting of Psalms, was quite an important group, because when a baby was born, the members would visit the *kimpetoren* (the woman who had given birth) and bring her printed *Shir Hamales* (15 chapters of the Psalms of David). These Psalms were printed in Hebrew, and used to be hung on the walls of the room where the mother lay with the newly-born child. The members of the *Chevra Tehillim* also used to recite Psalms when a person was seriously ill. When a death occurred, members of the society would sit through the night, reciting Psalms, as well as at the funeral in our cemetery, which was located on the other side of the River Neviazhe, running through Krakenowo. Then too, there was the *Chevra Mishnah*: in the *Beth Hamedrash* the

members of this society gathered around long tables each night, to learn *Mishnah,* taught by one or other of the learned *balabatim.* For those already more advanced in learning, there were two societies, *Ein Yaacov* and *Chevra Gemorrah.* It will be clearly seen from what I have written that our community was very well cared for as regards its welfare and spiritual life."

The *Mitzvah* of caring for others

From time immemorial Jews have helped each other, both personally and communally. This was one of the most important traditions of my own upbringing and a principle which I still cherish. I often ask myself where I and my *landsleit* learnt the lessons of charity and caring for our fellow Jews. The basis for these deeds undoubtedly came from the role models of our family and friends in the *shtetl.* I remember my own mother sneaking out of our house at night, laden with food baskets for the *orem leit*, the poor people of our *shtetl.* Here is Joseph Milne's description of how the *shtetl* showed its compassion:

> "Krakenowo had a well-organised Jewish community whose motto might well have been 'all for one and one for all'. As in every community, we too had our richer and our poorer people, but I do not remember that it ever happened that a Krakenower Jew lacked for a *challah* on the Sabbath, or *matzot* on the Passover. The richer *balabatim* were very charitable and our rabbi and the *gabboim* (honorary officers) were entrusted to assist the needy from the communal funds, without disclosing names. I recall, on many occasions, my grandmother rising very early in the morning to take some milk to people in need, or perhaps a chicken for a *kimpetoren.* If a Krakenower found himself in financial difficulties, our people did not hesitate; the baker, the butcher and the housewives would voluntarily bring him supplies without having to be asked. If a Krakenower lost his money, he did not have to lose his courage; assistance was soon at hand."

We children absorbed this care for others in every facet of our lives. The lesson must have been learnt well, as *landsmanschaften* were set up in many of the new lands to which Jewish people emigrated. These *landsmanschaften* supported Jews in need in their new countries and were very necessary, since the new immigrants seldom had much knowledge of the circumstances and language of their new country. The Krakenowo Sick Benefit and Benevolent Society in South Africa was particularly well organised in this respect. What is even more remarkable is that the children, relations and friends, who were born in South Africa, assisted our Society to collect enormous sums of money to help immigrants to establish themselves. This charitable concern for others found expression in the establishment of provident and annuity funds by our firm, Sydmore, for the benefit of all workers and employees irrespective of race and creed.

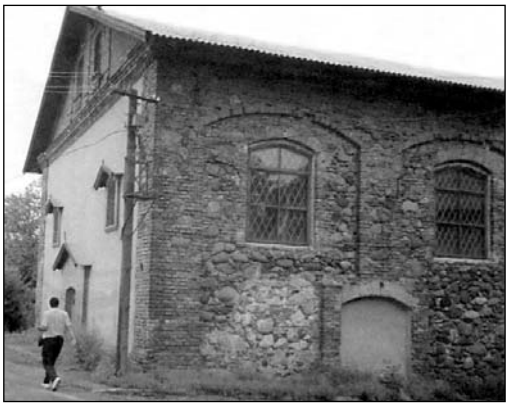
The Shul, 'Bet Medrash' and 'Klauz'

In our *shtetl* there were three places of worship and study, the stone *shul,* the wooden *bet medrash* and the *klauz.* The *shul* in Krakenowo was a very solid building made of stone. The design of the *shul* was very clever in that the men's section was slightly below the ground, while the women's section was a number of stairs up. This facilitated the elderly who had difficulty walking. There was a large dome in the roof of the *shul* which created an awesome interior. The *shul* was large enough to seat 500 people comfortably. The walls were very thick, about 900 mm, which made it very cool in summer but a cold and uncomfortable place in winter. During the winter months the smaller *klauz* was used instead. The wooden *bet medrash* was used throughout the year for both *davening* and studying. It had a large oven which was used in winter to warm the whole building. Joseph Milne describes these various places in our *shtetl:*

"Our *bet medrash* (house of study) and our *shul* were the largest and most beautiful buildings in the village, and we also had a smaller *shul* called the *klauz.* Of course we had a *chazan* and two *shammosim* (beadles), as well as a *kazonner rov*, which meant he had been appointed by the government as being responsible for the congregation. He had to report whether services held in the synagogue were carried out in such a manner as not to be detrimental in any way to the policies of the government.

Wooden 'Bet medrash' in Krakenowo.

The life of the community was centred at all times around the *bet medrash*. Every boy could read any *maftir* when he was about nine years of age. He was taught the *trop* (ritual melodies), and began to learn *Chumash* when he started attending cheder. It was therefore unnecessary for a boy to receive special training for his barmitzvah. Marriages were solemnised under the *chupah* outside the synagogue, in the shul *haif* (yard). I remember that the *chossen*, (bridegroom) used to wear a *kittel* (sashed white robe). The *klezmorim* (musicians) walked with all the *machutonim* (parents) from the *chossen's* home to the *shul*. There, under the stars, the *rov* and *chazan* would perform the wedding ceremony. Most of the weddings took place on a Friday. *Sheva brachot* (seven days of blessing) followed in accordance with Jewish law. Everyone in the village would send a present, mostly *lekach* and *tort* (biscuits and special sponge cake) with occasional gifts of money or other valuables. Saturday night, or *motzei Shabbes*, the celebration of the marriage and merriment continued. The *kallah's* (bride's) parents would usually pay for the musicians up to a certain



Outside Stone Shul in Krakenowo in 1992.

> hour, after which the dancers would pay the musicians themselves so that the merriment could continue. There were many young people who availed themselves of this opportunity and gladly paid up, as there was no occasion, other than a wedding, at which a Krakenower boy or girl could dance."

My own life was also influenced by the *bet medrash* and the *shul.* On Shabbat practically all Jews of the *shtetl* crowded into the *shul,* both men and to a lesser extent women and children. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur would be even fuller, as traders as well as students from out of town came home to be with their families. I remember how, as a child, the *chazan's* beautiful voice enchanted me; it was something I can never forget. Many of the women would weep and sob when the *Unetaneh Tokef* prayer was recited. This prayer explains that Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are Days of Judgment when *Hashem* decides who will live and who will die. These scenes are engraved on my memory forever. Even the men wept bitter tears when the *viduy* (confession) was chanted in unison. My father would beat his chest with every sin enumerated in the *Al Chet* on Yom Kippur.

The *shul* proved to be a house of safety as well as that of prayer. When World War I broke out there was much shelling around our little village. Jews were desperate for a place to hide. Many ran to the *shul* which was built from stone and had walls almost a metre thick. The design of the building was such that it was an ideal place to take cover from the dangers of mortar shells.

The *shul* survived both wars and was relatively unscathed by the burning of the rest of the town. When I visited Lithuania in 1992, the building was still standing, although it was obviously not used as a *shul*, but rather a storehouse or factory.

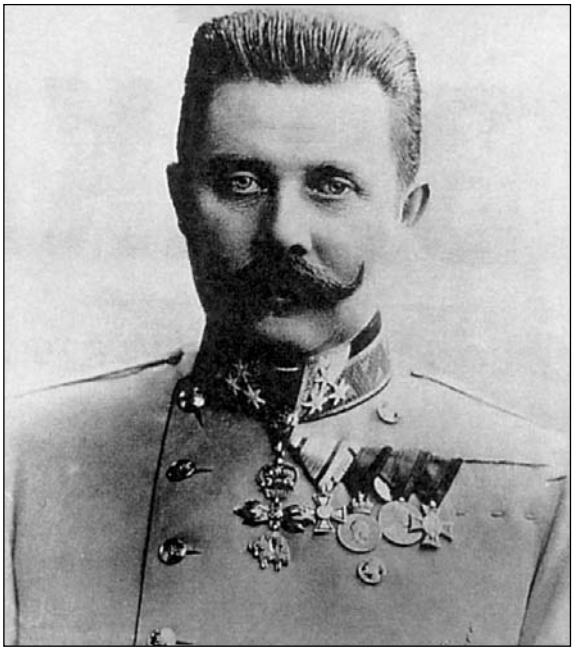
PORTAL TWO

War and Exile

Tisha B'Av

Historians of the future will write that, in a sense, *Tisha B'Av* 1914 was the beginning of a sea of troubles for all of Europe's Jews. The Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I, gave birth to Hitler and Nazism whose motto was *Deutschland über Alles*. The Germans wanted to avenge the wrongs done to them by the brutal peacemakers. The belief was that the first war could have been won had the Jews not stabbed Germany in the back! This was Hitler's cry in *Mein Kampf*. It was repeated endlessly by anti-Semites everywhere. It was seen as a fundamental truth and it ended with Auschwitz and the death of six million Jews.

Tisha B'Av is an ill-fated date in Jewish history. According to a well known *Aggada* on *Bamidbar* (Numbers 13-14), the Children of Israel wept all night when they heard the report of the *meraglim* or spies. Ten out of twelve men reported on the impossibility of conquering the Promised Land. "You believed that My promise was impossible to achieve," *Hashem* said that night. "You wept out of rebellion against Me, but I shall make you weep on that day for innumerable generations in the future." (*Talmud,Sotah*, p. 35)



World War I was sparked off by the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand at Sarajevo in 1914.

Hence, critical terrifying turning points in Jewish history occurred on *Tisha B'Av*. Both the First and Second *Bet Hamikdash*, together with the destruction of Jerusalem by

Babylon and Rome occurred on this day. So too did the fall of Betar and Bar Kochba, bringing Jewish independence to an end for over 1900 years.

The traumatic expulsion of Jews from Spain also took effect on Tisha B'Av 1492. Their Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, signed the decree earlier that year. By the fast of 9 Av, not a single Jew was permitted to remain on Spanish soil. On the insistence of Torquemada, head of the Spanish Inquisition, the annihilation of one of Jewry's most productive and wealthiest centres was accomplished.

It is therefore not by accident that World War I, which in turn led to the World War II and the Holocaust, also began on Tisha B'Av 1914. The events leading up to the war were briefly these: The Archduke Francis Ferdinand of the Hapsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire was assassinated in Sarajevo. On 28 June 1914, a month later, Austria declared war on Serbia. Czarist Russia immediately ordered general mobilisation. Austro-Russian negotiations collapsed and the German Reich of Kaiser Wilhelm II declared war on Imperial Russia. It was 7pm on 1 August. The fast of Tisha B'Av began that very evening. The next day, as dawn broke, the German Reichwehr invaded Luxembourg. On 3 and 4 August war was declared against France and England. World War I had begun.

Other events occuring on Tisha B'Av

The gas chambers of Auschwitz were opened on 23 July 1942, corresponding to Tisha B'Av of that year.

On 15 July 1945, the world's first atomic bomb was exploded at 5:30am over a New Mexico desert. On Tisha B'Av that year, corresponding to 19 July, President Truman of the USA made the fateful decision to use this secret weapon against human beings. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki followed in due course.

Tisha B'Av in Krakenowo

A letter written by a Jew from Krakenowo on Tisha B'Av was received some time later in Johannesburg. Here are some descriptions of what went on in the *shtetl* that day.

> "Today is Tisha B'Av. Jews are fasting. Jews all over the world are mourning the *churban*, the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, 2000 years ago. Here in Krakenowo, the *churban* is even greater. Mothers are lamenting for their sons. Children are mourning for their fathers. Yesterday Russia's mobilisation for the war took them away. The whole country is in a turmoil over the war that has just broken out.
>
> On Monday we first heard of the ultimatum which Austria has given to Serbia. On Tuesday and Wednesday the situation deteriorated. I know of course that you in Johannesburg know about the situation better than we do, for you have no censorship in South Africa.
>
> On Thursday evening, while going for a walk along Keidaner Gas, we noticed that the *Pristav* (town officer) and the clerk from Volost were running around the town. Eventually they went into the Post Office. They were there for about half an hour. They subsequently came out and were in a great hurry. Within 15 minutes mounted messengers were on their horses and on their way to the outlying villages. Nobody was sure as to the reason, but we conjectured that it was in connection with the mobilisation for the army.
>
> On Friday morning when I went out into the street, I saw the official placards on the walls. Every man who had served in the army was being called up, even those in possession of the 'red documents' who were not normally called up together with those who had served their time. The latter were usually called up during the second emergency call-up.
>
> By 10 am the Christian population mobilized and came to the market place en masse with horses and wagons. Count Zavissa was in charge and he seconded the horses and wagons for the army. This took the whole day – till 10 at night. It was a noisy affair, greater than any *yerid* (annual fair). They were extended over an area stretching from the house of Yankel Baruch to the office of the *Pristav* – all along Keidaner Gas. The

mobilised transport of horses and wagons had to wait there till Saturday morning. These were sent to Ponevez together with the reserves. It was a terrible, heart-rending scene when, on Saturday morning, the new recruits were on their way. Mothers and children wept bitterly. Their screams deafened our ears. One Christian woman fainted when her three sons were marched away to the war. These were her last children. She had no more and she remained alone in the world.

Nineteen Jewish men were taken. Among them were Yosse Archiek, Shayah Abe, Hirsche the blacksmith. There is, however, hope that they will possibly be freed, seeing that they are over 42 years old. There is also Greinem, son of Avrom-Yitzchak Chaim Hirsche dem Katzev's. The others I do not know. They are confined in the synagogue courtyard. Among the reserves is also Itzik, son-in-law of Berel Mingelaner.

All the banks were closed on Friday. Since that day they have not paid any interest. No promissory notes can be presented for payment. The unrest and noise is too terrible. The whole of Kovno Gubernia is on a war footing. On Tuesday the inhabitants of Kovno were given three days to leave the area. People closed their businesses and ran away. There were no passenger trains, as all of them are full of the military. The Kovno Government has meanwhile moved to Ponevez. The Governor himself is also there. The civil service has also moved to Ponevez. The same happened in Warsaw (Poland) and Libov (Latvia). The Jews of Ponevez who tried to get across the border were shot dead.

Getze Galasky's children have just arrived from Kovno. They told us that they had to sleep at the railway station from Thursday till noon on Sunday. Only today did they get a ticket and came on a goods train. Altogether Russia has declared mobilisation in 42 *gubernias,* it is also said that if no peace treaty will be agreed upon, there will be a second stage of mobilisation. Then more of us will then be involved.

I could write to you a lot more news, but I haven't the mind for it. My money is deposited in Ponevez. If a peace treaty is concluded, then they will pay me out. If this is not to be, I can bid it farewell. It was apparently *bashiert* that I should come at such a time to Russia – the country of *goyim*."

Joe Resnick

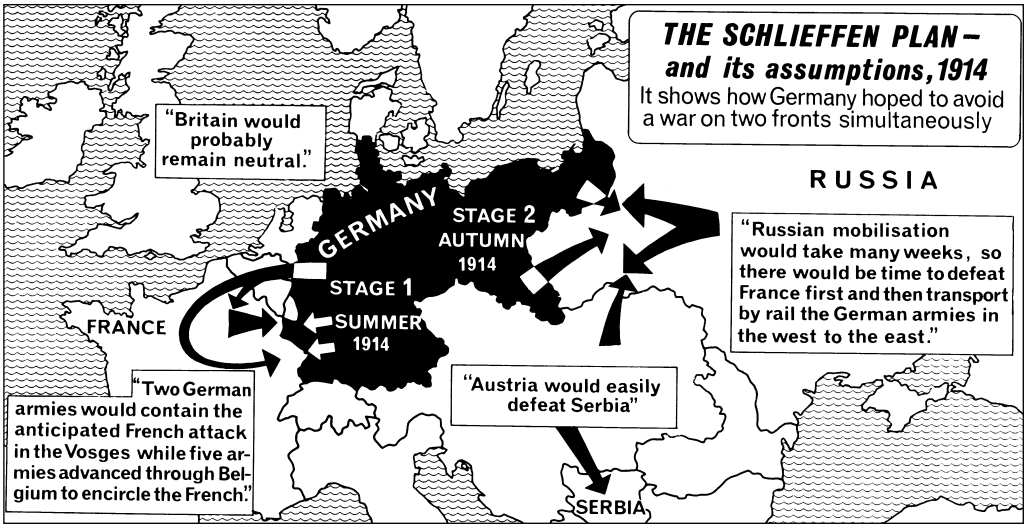
Krakenowo 20 July, 1914

(Diamond Jubilee Brochure of Krakenowo Society, 1961, pg 22)

The Schlieffen Plan

The Austrian and German generals were ready for war and felt that they had not underestimated their enemy's strength. They believed they must strike the first blow so hard that the enemy would not recover. Germany did not want to fight on two fronts simultaneously. The first thrust would be made on the western front by advancing through Belgium and then encircling Paris thus taking France by surprise. They knew that Russia was not properly mobilised, a feat which would take a while. During that time the Germans thought they could defeat the French and still have time to move troops on their well planned railway link to the eastern front. This plan was known as the Schlieffen Plan and was devised by the former Chief of the German General Staff.

The Russians had other ideas. They unexpectedly invaded East Prussia. There were very small German forces in the east and initially the Russians were victorious. The East Prussians trembled and cried "The Cossacks are coming!" However, once the German army under General Hindenburg and Ludendorff mobilised, Russia suffered two major defeats at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes in 1914, the latter being close to the Lithuanian border.


THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN –
and its assumptions, 1914
It shows how Germany hoped to avoid a war on two fronts simultaneously
"Britain would probably remain neutral."
RUSSIA
GERMANY
STAGE 2
AUTUMN
1914
STAGE 1
SUMMER
1914
FRANCE
"Russian mobilisation would take many weeks, so there would be time to defeat France first and then transport by rail the German armies in the west to the east."
"Two German armies would contain the anticipated French attack in the Vosges while five armies advanced through Belgium to encircle the French."
"Austria would easily defeat Serbia"
SERBIA

The Schlieffen Plan

Spies and Traitors

The Russian authorities realised the war was going to be a protracted affair. They began to get jittery and looked at ways and means to stop the onslaught. Czarist policy was at no time favourable towards the Jews. The pogroms of 1881 and 1905 were organised with government support. Within a week of the outbreak of World War I, the following appeared in a press release in Groza:

> "Jews should be sent to places that may fall into enemy (German) hands. When our army retakes these places, the Jews may then be expelled as foreigners".

Russian Soldiers

Military bulletins followed, accusing the Jewish population as traitors and spies for the German army. Prince Nicholas Nicholaievich, uncle of the Czar, was in charge of the Western Front. General Yanuskevich was Commander-in-Chief of the army. Anti-Jewish suspicion and hostility were their guidelines. The press which they controlled, as well as communiques, posed a threat of pogroms and persecutions to the Jewish population.

Lithuanian Jewry responded by proclaiming their patriotic allegiance. Community leaders in Vilna urged the community to provide the Russian Fatherland with every possible assistance. This was also the consistent policy of the Jewish press and the Jewish community throughout the Empire responded accordingly. Despite this effort, when General Renenkamf's army suffered a defeat on the Eastern Front, a scapegoat was needed to boost morale and protect the honour of the Russian army. The Jews were used for this purpose, and espionage show trials were staged and convictions obtained. Many of these unfortunate people were sentenced to exile in Siberia or prison.

The Kuzhi Incident

The next step was the expulsion of the whole of Lithuanian Jewry. To this end an incident had to be created. An opportunity arose in the tiny hamlet of Kuzhi, near the city of Shavel. The hamlet was captured by the Germans on 28 April 1915. Eight soldiers decided to go on a foraging expedition in search of food and other provisions. They visited some Jewish homes, took what they wanted and left immediately. Two days later Kuzhi was recaptured by the Piatogorsk 131st Battalion. They were then shelled by the Germans and the hamlet was burnt down. The Russian army accused the local Jews of assisting the Germans in this battle.

This minor incident was exploited to the full by the Czarist anti-Semitic forces. It was debated in the Russian Parliament and deliberately blown out of proportion in every major newspaper. A special commission of inquiry was appointed, headed by Alexander Kerensky, to investigate these accusations. For the Jews of Lithuania, however, the die was cast. The expulsion of nearly 200 000 Jews was set into motion.

Expulsion of Lithuanian Jewry

The rumour soon spread that the Jews were praying and hoping for a German victory. The reports further stated that the Jews were spying for the approaching enemy and were, by nature, traitors to holy Mother Russia. The gossip abounded and fantastic nonsensical stories began to circulate. One ver-

sion said that Jews had hidden telephonic gadgets in their enormous beards! Another said they fed small gold coins to their geese and then sent them over the enemy lines. At the same time, the Germans continued on their victorious course and with each of their victories the Jews became more blameworthy.

When the Germans occupied Rassein, a Lithuanian district capital, one Russian newspaper blamed its many Jews of co-operating in the offensive. Another called for a "Final Solution" of the Jewish problem. The Czarist Empire identified all Jews as dangerous traitors. Thus began the first expulsion of the Jews in early 1914. By April, the Jews of Kurland (Latvia) were given orders to move and in May it was the turn of the Jews of the Kovno *Gubernia.* The command for the people in my *shtetl* to evacuate came from Ponevez in a very specific dispatch. The final date of departure was given as 5 May 1915. Any Jew remaining in the district after that time would be arrested and court-martialled in accordance with emergency military regulations.

Wave after wave of exiled Lithuanian Jews left the war zone and were treated with particular severity. In some areas only a few hours grace was granted. The *bezneches,* or refugees (*plitim* in Hebrew) could not go where it suited them, as was the case elsewhere. Specific areas were allocated where the Jewish exiles could go. The Czar's police behaved very strictly. The expulsion was carried out with a brutality previously unexhibited by other governments. People became uneasy and afraid. No Jew was spared. Old people, pregnant women, hospitalised invalids, sick people and infants were all treated alike. No mercy was shown. From the Ponevez Old Age Home alone, forty-three bedridden Jews (some in their nineties) were told to clear out. When a woman appealed to the *Pristav* to be allowed to remain an extra hour to stay with her dying husband, she was refused permission. The old Jew was left to die all alone while she was forced to get onto her wagon.

Even worse was the decree that Lithuanian Jewry (unlike Poles and other groups) were to be issued with "passports" specifying where they would move to and where they would eventually settle. This document was in fact an indication that the reason for banishment was military in character. In other words, the person identified in the document had committed a crime relating to the war effort against Germany. This was bound to affect the bearer of the "passport" most adversely.

Hiding the family silver, brass and copper

Remnants of the family's silver, brass and copper.

As early as August 1914, we became aware of the changes taking place in our little world of Krakenowo. The first *bezneches* came to our town from Tilsit, a Prussian town. The Krakenowo families with large homes provided them with accommodation and the whole town helped to furnish their other needs. At the same time, all the ethnic Germans living in our region were ordered by the Russians to evacuate into the interior of the country. Many passed through Krakenowo with their wagons piled up high with their belongings. My parents must have discussed the possible outcome of all this chaos. They must have looked at many options, one of which was the necessity of hiding our bulky heavy silver, copper and brassware. This had to be done before we were given the order to vacate our home. All I remember is the whispering and secrecy of something going on outside. Morris and I were far too young to participate in all this intrigue. My knowledge of the events was only from discussions many years later when we returned to our beloved *shtetl.*

My father and my older brother Heisel (Harry) who was sixteen years old at the time, dug a special trench adjacent to the house. They then wrapped all valuable items that we could not take with us in old cloths and paper and stuffed them into strong sacking.

This in turn was placed in wooden boxes and placed in the deep trench. They then filled up the trench with earth and planted a vegetable garden on top of it. This was to disguise the spot where our precious silver candlesticks, brass and copperware were hidden.

We begin our journey

Our turn to move came on 5 May 1915, just fourteen days before Shavuot. The Jews were given a period of eight hours in which to leave Krakenowo. Any Jew remaining in the area after the specified time would be arrested and court-martialled according to the emergency military regulations. That Shavuot there was no thought of my mother's delicious cheese-lokshen *kugel*; no thought of the *shul* beautifully decorated with leaves and flowers, nor of the *bikkurim* procession in which we children usually participated. This Shavuot was different. Wave after wave of exiled Jews were forced to leave the war zone. I heard my parents talking about how some *bezneches* (refugees) had been stoned and mocked as they had moved from the safety of their towns. In Krakenowo they made it clear to us that they were happy to get rid of us. Stories abounded how Jews were being robbed of their possessions and how their abandoned houses were ransacked by the *shkotzim* (wild hooligans). Christian wagon owners were encouraged to charge their clients higher fees, since they believed that all Jews had lots of money. In many other cases they were forbidden by the police to allow Jews to use their wagons. This resulted in many families having to trudge on foot from their native towns into the vast hinterland of Russia. My father managed to procure a wagon, but had to pay an exorbitant price for it.

Wagons loaded for exile.

As I mentioned previously, we lived about 30 km from Ponevez. We were ordered

by the Russian police to move to Ponevez and from there we would board a train to a destination unknown. The journey to the train station in Ponevez was slow and must have taken two days because of our heavily laden wagon. We could, of course, not take much with us on this journey. My blessed mother packed warm clothes for the winter, mattresses and perenes (duvets) as well as essential foodstuffs.

Families laden with their worldly possessions on wagons plodded along, many oblivious to the radiance of the summer. They were more concerned with pogromists and hooligans. We finally arrived in Ponevez with other families and their meagre possessions. Parents and their children boarded the goods train and gradually settled down. You can imagine our anxiety; not knowing when we would leave or where we were to go.

In the meantime, the local Lithuanians soon moved into the previously owned Jewish homes and claimed what was ours as theirs. Some of the refugees eventually returned to their original homes and reclaimed what was rightfully theirs, but many others left, never to return.

Krakenowo becomes a war front

Years later I heard stories from my cousin Shaia (Israel) Stein. He told me that before he left on the exile into Russia, the road leading from Shadowa was in German hands and that their troops were marching in the direction of Krakenowo. In an article in the Krakenowo Jubilee Brochure he wrote:

> "Everybody started packing, putting up shutters, and taking valuables. All started moving out of the town in the direction away from the advancing Germans. We hadn't gone far, only about a mile, when the German cavalry overtook us. We moved off the road and into the ploughed fields. Behind the cavalry came marching troops and hundreds of wagons loaded with German military equipment. After that came the artillery.

> The Germans did not interfere with us in any way and at nightfall we stopped at a farm off the road. The troop movement continued all night long and the German Wehrmacht, in the name of Kaiser Wilhelm, occupied Krakenowo and the surrounding areas. The next day, however, the Russians counter-attacked and the area was once more in the hands of the Russians.
>
> On Saturday no shul services were held. Everybody ran for shelter. Some hid in cellars; others used the synagogue as a shelter. By 4 o'clock the officer in charge of the town came to tell us that the shul was not safe and that we must leave the town and go towards Ponevez. Everybody started moving. The older people who could not walk were put up onto the carts. Those who were not so religious rode on horseback. Soon the road was crowded and blocked with people. We stopped at the Yasna Gurka Mill and, when it grew dark, we saw huge fires in the direction of Krakenowo. We all thought our town was on fire. People were praying. Everybody was up and awake all night. Early next morning, several children walked back to the town to see what had happened. We discovered that the bridge across the Neviazhe was down and smouldering, but the town itself was not burning and that the troops had all gone."

War is a hard taskmaster. Many *shtetls* were burnt to the ground by both the advancing Germans and the retreating Russians. In some cases a town changed hands more than once. Some refugees were pelted with stones by village youngsters who thought it great fun. Others were robbed of the few miserable possessions they took with them. Only on rare occasions, did some kindly *Pristav* (officer in charge of police) interfere to save the *Zhids* from vandalism.

In Czarist Russia, the "Black Hundreds", an association of fanatical pogromists, had adherents throughout the Pale of Settlement. During this period of the war their agents travelled extensively along the railway lines, extending from Memel in the west, right into the interior. On arrival at a station, they made it their aim to incite local peasants to Jew-hatred and encouraged hooligan elements to make the lives of the Jewish refugees as unbearable as they could.

With every defeat of the Russian army on the Eastern Front the position of the Jews became more and more precarious. A rumour circulated that Cossacks would be reinforcing the Russian army on the Eastern Front. Jews had learnt from bitter experience that these regiments were infested with men who had brutal sentiments towards Jews and Judaism. No Jew could forget the barbaric Chmielnitzky Massacres of 1648/9 perpetrated by the Cossacks. The rumour became a reality on 10 July 1915 when the Cossacks arrived in Anikst. By

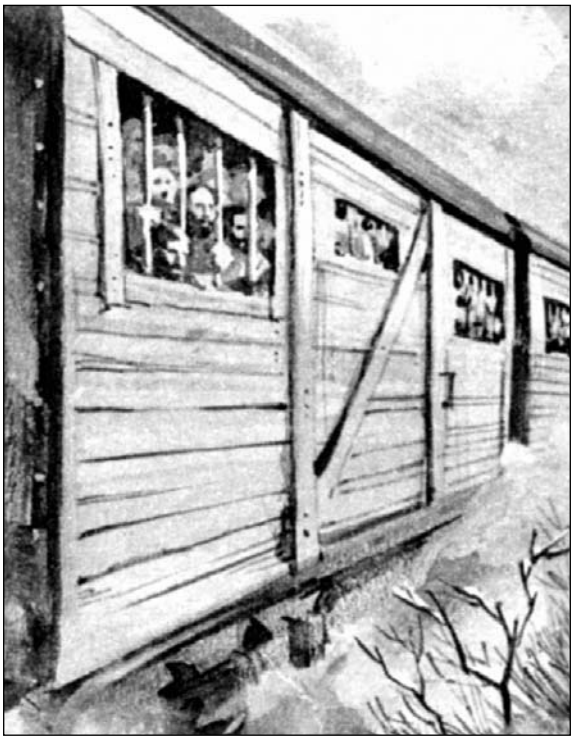
14 July, just a few days before the Jews were due to leave for Russia, a frightful pogrom had taken place in Anikst and a month later in Rakishok and Viedz, as well as other *shtetls* not far from Krakenowo.

Wars have been with mankind since time immemorial. For all participants they are tragic. For children war is particularly devastating. We were turned out of our homes and driven into the unknown. I will never forget the scenes of desolation I witnessed as a child of six. We all felt the hardships of the war. Artillery shelling, cavalry charges and infantry movements were all around us. Where would we find shelter, food, warmth and comfort? I felt sure that we little ones would not survive. It was the most traumatic time of my life. I was destined never to forget it.

Every event, however, can be a gift from *Hashem* if we only look hard enough. History plays strange tricks with the lives of communities and individuals. By their expulsion from the war zones, Lithuanian Jewry suffered but was not exposed to any wholesale slaughter. From 1915 to 1920 we went to live in the Russian interior. In a sense this was quite fortunate for us.

Leaving Lithuania for Russia's interior

In total, nearly 200 000 Jews were expelled and settled in the vast interior of Russia. As I stated earlier, we started our trek by travelling by wagon to Ponevez on 5 May 1915. During the journey on the wagon I was frightened that I might fall off as I was perched precariously on top of our belongings. In Ponevez we found hundreds of other Litvak refugees from *shtetls* and villages



Travelling on a goods train into Russia.

in the district. A long thirty-truck goods train was waiting for us. Thirty people and their belongings were tightly packed into each truck. We were most uncomfortable, and I heard many women weeping and children screaming. Nobody had a clear idea of how long each particular leg of the journey would take. For me every stage of that awfully long journey was a dreadful nightmare.

Our trek into the Russian interior was not one continuous journey. We moved in fits and starts for weeks on end in covered railway goods trucks. As there were no toilet facilities on board, the train stopped along the route for this purpose. The train driver was sometimes spiteful and did not give people enough time, threatening to leave them behind which caused much consternation to the passengers. Tocker, our neighbour in Krakenowo, actually missed the train and took three days to catch up and rejoin his family.

At no time was it clear to us where we would eventually settle for the duration of the war. In some places we stayed over for a few days, in others for weeks. However, even in the gloomiest circumstances there was hope. We learned a wonderful lesson from the assistance and relief given to us by the local Jewish communities who made us welcome wherever we stopped. This benevolence has been the pivot around which my life's activities have always turned. The warm feeling that Diaspora Jewry did not forget us in our hour of need gave us additional support and encouragement. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in particular made funds as well as medical aid available to us. Russian Jews also organised themselves to feed, clothe and shelter us.

My cousin Cherne saves a Sefer Torah

'Hirsh der Sofer'
The scribe with a 'Talmid' (Pupil)

This is a story of a woman's courage and enterprise. In the rush and hurry of expulsion, the beautiful Sefer Torah which Reb Hirshel the Sofer had written was forgotten. Cherne Stein's mother Sora, many years before, was determined to purchase a Sefer Torah. After much hard work she saved 50 roubles and commissioned Reb Hirsh to write one for her family. The task took three years to complete and the Sefer Torah was the pride and joy of the family.

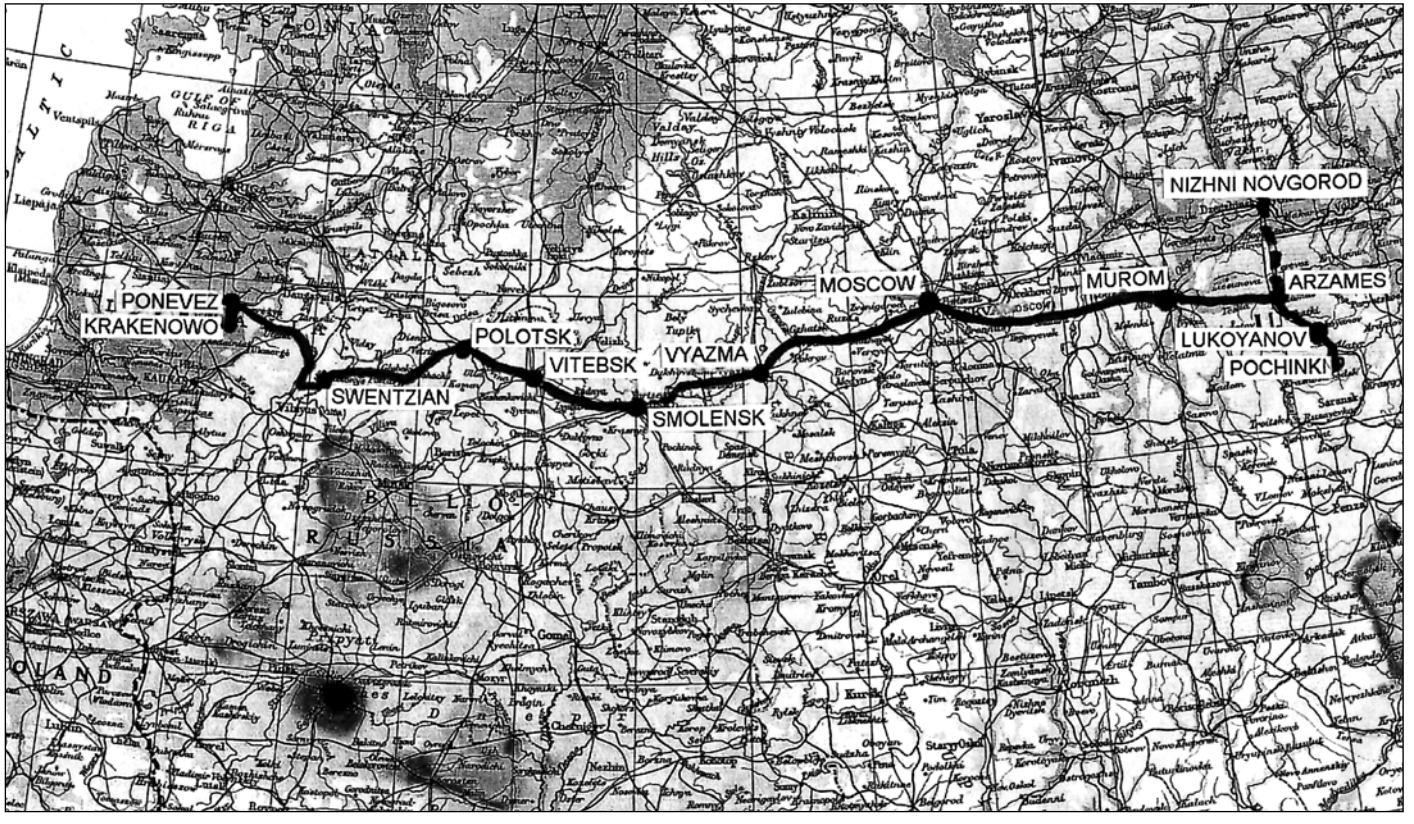
With the sudden expulsion from Krakenowo, the Sefer Torah was left behind. This fact, however, was remembered by Cherne Stein and she felt that it was her responsibility to bring it with her on our journey into exile. We were at this time in Ponevez, 30 km from Krakenowo. The family tried to dissuade her. We were paupers and *bezneches* now, and since it was war time it would endanger her life to try anything so risky as rushing back into the *shtetl* Krakenowo which had now become a war zone and battles were still raging nearby.

Cherne Stein was no ordinary housewife. Once she had made up her mind, she was braver than any Cossack! She somehow managed to hire a horse and cart and we all watched with trepidation as she disappeared in the direction of Krakenowo.

"You'll miss the train, Cherne," everybody screamed at her hysterically.

"Don't worry Yidden," she called out cheerfully. "I'll be back in no time."

She was as good as her word, and after some time she arrived back with Reb Hirshel's Torah safely wrapped up in her long shawl. Cherne had saved this precious Sefer Torah from inevitable destruction and she guarded it carefully throughout the Russian exile, returning eventually to Krakenowo with it still in her possession. Ultimately it was brought to South Africa by her son Shaia (Israel). My family then bought it from Shaia in 1979 and handed it to the Sydenham-Highlands North Synagogue for safekeeping. It is still a beautiful Torah and its *sofrut* or calligraphy is superb. It now belongs to my son Stanley and is in regular use.



Map showing our journey into Russia.

From Ponevez to Pochinki

We arrived at our first stop, Swentzian, on Friday, 14 May 1915. This small station is approximately 160 km from Ponevez, in the Vilna *Gubernia* which was still part of Lithuania. We left the train, taking some of our belongings with us and were accommodated in austere military barracks. Once again the space allocated to each family was inadequate, as hundreds of *bezneches* had arrived before us. We spent an anxious Shavuot, a festival which had always been joyous one, with the local Jewish population. This community, as its brethren in other places along our route would do, provided us with loving care and support. For the fifteen days we spent in Swentzian they brought food and hot water daily. They took many of the young children, my brother Morris and myself included, into the warmth of their homes, giving us sweets to eat as well as a few playthings. Each evening they brought us back to the barracks and our families.

One morning, a few days after Shavuot, the police told us we were to leave Swentzian and get moving. We were crowded into goods trucks again heading for the unknown. The screaming and crying around me was very frightening. I was, after all, a small six-year-old, undernourished and traumatised. I had nightmares about the darkness into which we were travelling. In the short time we were in Swentzian, I had become accustomed to the barracks and the local Jewish community and now we were moving again.

After travelling for what seemed like an endless period, we arrived a few days later in Polotsk some 240 km from Swentzian. We stayed at this stop for two days. Our belongings were locked up during the day and we were well treated by the local Jewish families. At night we slept on the train. Soon we were packed into the crowded train which now moved on towards Vitebsk, 80 km along the track. We stayed there over Shabbat and were taken into local Jewish homes and were made very welcome. On Monday we were back on the railway, travelling 100 km to Smolensk, a strategic city made famous by Napoleon who won a battle there a century before. After about ten days we moved once more. Our next stop was Vyazma, 150 km along the route, where we stayed for three days. I remember this stop well as it was there that we were told that our initial

destination was to be Moscow. This was not to be our final stop, mind you, just a central collection point from which thousands upon thousands of *bezneches* were to be dispersed in all directions – a great many of them to the Urals and even the cold wastelands of Siberia. Our stay in Vyazma was also memorable because of the restricted diet we had to endure. All we had was rye bread and salt herrings.

Before we could catch our breath we moved again, this time 80 km to Borodino (which Napoleon had also made famous). We stayed there for a short two days and then travelled 175 km to Povlensky, a suburb of Moscow. The Jews of Moscow proved to be the most hospitable of all our hosts on this dreadful journey into exile. The whole of Moscow Jewry seemed to be at the station to greet us on our arrival. The railway officials locked up our goods trucks and we were then allowed to go with various Jewish hosts into their warm and comfortable homes for the duration of our stay there.

All too soon we packed up and journeyed again. We really felt like *Bnei Yisrael* wandering around a wasteland as we travelled for many days. The next stop was in Murom 320 km down the track and from there we moved to Arzames 100 km further on. When we next boarded the train we were heading towards the town of Lukoyanov where we were to stay for two or three weeks. The delay at this stop was to enable the authorities (aided by the Joint) to organise accommodation for us in Pochinki, a small village some 30 km away, where we were destined to spend the bulk of the war years. Deep in the heart of Russia, we were far away from the German-Russian border and any possibility of carrying out espionage for the Germans. The Russian authorities had orchestrated this entire upheaval in our lives because of this fear.

To facilitate the transfer to our final destination, we were met by representatives of the Jewish Organisation for Displaced Persons and under its supervision the final stage of our journey was executed. We got off the railway and moved to temporary housing. Only when all was ready for us were we ushered onto sledges which then took us to Pochinki. The sledges were necessary as it was already getting colder and the roads were snowbound. Any other form of transport would have been futile. The 30 km journey from Lukoyanov to Pochinki was the terrible climax of a long and exhausting journey. My brother, Harry recorded most of this journey in his diary. He wrote:

> "When we arrived at the station on 31 August 1915, we and our belongings were placed on horse-drawn sledges and, after two hours, we arrived in the town of Pochinki. We

were completely knocked out and exhausted. The children were crying. There were wooden beds and we had to use our own mattresses and pillows which we had brought from Krakenowo. I was with my parents and Bobba Beila, as well as my brothers and sisters – eight people in all, packed into very tight accommodation. Bobba Beila helped my mother cook over a fire made of coke and cattle dung, which burned quite nicely, considering there was not too much wood available at the time."

We were all tired and worn out when we reached Pochinki. The only positive aspect was that we could at last settle down into some form of routine and a more permanent home. It was unbelievably cold and our first task was to provide warmth for the family. After several days the elders of our group began making arrangements for a place to hold the Rosh Hashana services which, in 1915, fell on Thursday 9 and Friday 10 September. It was vital for our group to worship together in accordance with our tradition.

It took us a long time to adjust to the new environment. Russian relief committees, financed by Jewish people in the USA, helped the displaced people. The most famous of these was the "Joint" which I mentioned previously. It was created in 1914 with the philanthropist Felix M Warburg as the first chairman of its American Chapter.

The "Joint" has been engaged in bringing relief and medical care to Jews in many parts of the world, both in war and peacetime, for over eighty years.

The 'Joint' distributing food.

The Stein Family goes to the Urals

While we were travelling towards Moscow, our cousins, Cherne Stein and her family, were heading toward the Ural Mountains which separate Europe from Asia. Here is an extract from Shaia (Israel) Stein's account in the Diamond Jubilee Brochure of 1961:

> "When we arrived in Perm we were taken to a committee centre where we were given a wonderful welcome as we were the first refugees to arrive. But, as the housing problem was acute, we were advised to go by boat to the town of Solikamsk.
>
> Never had we dreamed that so far away from home, deep in the heart of the Ural Mountains, we would find such warm-hearted people as those who welcomed us in Solikamsk. When the boat brought us to the nearest landing, we saw dozens of sledges coming towards us. They put our luggage on them and brought us to the town. The streets were lined with Jewish people. There were placards and banners across the streets saying : 'Help the poor and hungry refugees.'
>
> We were taken to a school building. Tables were laid out with plenty of food and drink. They overwhelmed us with their kindness. Tradesmen were given help with tools, a few tailors were supplied with machines, the butcher was given a small shop. We all settled down in earnest to a peaceful existence. The children were sent to Russian schools and even had a Hebrew teacher – a Jew, of course!
>
> The first thing the committee did was to find a suitable place for a shul. In one of the adjoining huts, a *mikveh* was built. Every Saturday was market day. The farmers from the surrounding districts would bring in frozen fish, fresh vegetables and fox skins to sell. With the permission of the spiritual leader, the Jewish shopkeepers and tradesmen were allowed to take part in the market day on the Sabbath, as well as *yomtavim,* in order to make a living.
>
> We stayed in Solikamsk for eighteen months and then moved to Tsaritzyn (now Stalingrad) where we remained for two years. From there, we went back to Krakenowo in 1918."

Michael Stein dies

I have given you but a few examples of the hazards and discomforts of our

The Stein family in front of their home in Krakenowo.
(from left) Unknown, Mooma Sora, Cherne, Sonia, Zalman, Itzik.

exile. I am quite sure that in many ways we Seeffs were fortunate in getting to our final destination without too many accidents. However, the Steins at Solikamsk were not so lucky.

Cherne's husband, Zalman, had emigrated to South Africa before the outbreak of the war. Cherne and her daughter Sonia thus had to look after the three younger children Yitzchak (Itzik), Michael and Shaia (Israel) on their own, while still trying to eke out a living. The children went to the local Russian government school in Solikamsk and were made to participate in all the school exercises and activities. One of the Russian teachers coerced little Michael, as well as other children, to find a ladder and climb a young tree. Michael had been weakened by the long and arduous train journey as well as the near-starvation conditions that accompanied it. He had never been an athletic child and was terrified at the thought of what he had been asked to do. The teacher refused to take "no" for an answer and Michael had to obey. On his way down he slipped and fell, grabbing one of the branches, but it broke under his weight. He fell very badly, landing on his head. Michael was rushed to a nearby hospital

and lay in a coma for over two weeks. His devastated mother and sister visited him as often as they could. Sadly he was destined never to return to the warm, loving care of his family. One evening a nurse arrived at the Stein home, before they could go and visit, and told them that Michael had passed away. You can just imagine the shock to his poor mother and her surviving children. Michael was only 12 years old – a boy struck down at the beginning of his life.

The Stein family managed to survive this ghastly ordeal. Much later, Shaia (Israel) who was 10 years old at the time of the accident, came to South Africa. His older brother Itzik remained in Russia after the war and qualified as a physician in Leningrad. He later became a colonel in the Red Army. He and many other Soviet Jews took part in the fierce resistance against Hitler between 1941 and 1945.

Settling down in exile

My family and I were lucky that nothing fatal happened to us. Our home was very cramped. Initially there was sufficient food for everyone, but this state of affairs changed as the war progressed and food became more scarce. We were fortunate though in many ways. We had several *landsleit* families in exile with us as well as Rabbi Chaimowitz. He was our *shochet* and we often had chicken for Shabbat. He was also a qualified *mohel,* (he performed my brother Morris's *brit milah* when we were still in Krakenowo). The rabbi organised a small *shul* for us and he regularly *leined* (read) from the Torah for the community. He led us in daily worship and had a great influence on our group. My sister Rivel, in particular, became very *frum* (pious) as a result of his educational efforts.

The struggle to make a living

Soon after our arrival in Pochinki, my parents began to look around for some way to make a living and put food on the table for the family. Because of the difficulties of wartime, many Russian peasants who lived in the vicinity continually ran out of basic necessities such as needles, buttons, press-studs and hooks for sewing, knitting and crocheting. Being devout Christians, they also required little crosses to wear around their necks, especially when their festivals were celebrated. My parents decided to fill this gap in the market. Merchandise for these purposes was obtainable from the large shops and markets in Nizhni-Novogrod and it was decided that my elder brother Heisel (Harry) and my elder sister Rodel should move to Nizhni-Novogrod and supply the family in Pochinki with the items required.

I become a smuggler

I was too young to be of benefit to the family in this endeavour, but as *Bezneche* children mature quickly, by the age of eight I had become street-wise and quite alert to the family's plight. Heisel and Rodel had taken up residence in Nizhni-Novogrod and were helping my father by sending products from there so that he could set up a stall in Pochinki. In order for my parents to continue selling items in Pochinki, a courier was needed to transport the goods from Heisel and Rodel. This was an important but very dangerous task.

At the time of my birth, the Czars had created a secret police known as the Ochrana. They were used in very much the same way that Hitler used the Gestapo. When Lenin and the Bolsheviks came to power they established an even more fearful network of spies, informers and secret police known as the Gub-Cheka. This force numbered some 15 000 men, making it the largest body of its kind in the world at that time. In 1918, Lenin issued the following order to the Soviets at Nizhni-Novogrod: "Instant terror must be introduced against speculators, hoarders, work-shirkers, bourgeoisie and prostitutes...Not a minute is to be wasted."

Trotsky, head of the Red Army, was equally outspoken: "We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class – this is the essence of Red Terror," he repeatedly proclaimed.

The Communists who were in power at this time, hated the *burzus* (rich people or traders). When they found people dealing as shopkeepers they called them *speculanten* (speculators). The Gub-Cheka were still inexperienced but nevertheless had power and could use their discretion and even shoot anyone if they so wished. Anybody travelling on a goods train (no other type of trains were available at the time), could be stopped and searched by the Gub-Cheka. Those found with any type of merchandise, irrespective of how large or small, would be taken off the train, the articles would be confiscated and they could then be beaten, arrested or shot.

Since I was a young, innocent-looking child, I became the new go-between. The railway line running due north from Pochinki took me directly to Nizhni-Novogrod. I managed to slip through the crowds and did not pay for a ticket, nor did I stand in the long queues of peasants and travellers who were also going to the big city. Midway between the two stations, the train stopped at a place called Arzames, where the branch line linked this local line to the great Trans-Siberian Railway.

While travelling north I had nothing to fear. I had no "contraband" on me as yet, all I had in my pockets were my meagre sandwiches. The way back was an entirely different story. Danger lurked all around. Fortunately, no-one ever suspected a thin, starving youngster like me as an illegal courier. When I arrived in Nizhni-Novogrod I would stay with my siblings. It was always wonderful to see them again, but this joy also included hard work. The contraband items of needles, buttons, press-studs and hooks as well as amulets on bright chains, had to be sewn into the lining of my jacket, shirt and trousers. When all was secure

and I had rested for a few days, I made the return journey, this time southward bound towards Pochinki. The regular trains were always crowded and I was easily able to hide among the passengers. When the conductors came into the coach they did not seem to notice me, presuming I was with one of the adults. I also looked rather frail and appeared to be an unlikely candidate to be carrying any illegal merchandise. When I was asked what I was doing I simply said: "Nothing", which seemed to satisfy them. Inwardly, however, I was very frightened.

The goods I carried were offered to the local peasants and townfolk. Throughout the war there was a great scarcity of these goods among the Russian population. My family made a reasonable profit from either hawking or bartering these items for farm produce such as eggs, butter and poultry for Shabbat and festivals.

Had I been apprehended, questioned and searched during any of these expeditions, I would have landed in jail or worse! Fortunately, nobody ever suspected or paid attention to me. I became quite adept at ducking and diving from the authorities. I made my way through baggage-heaps and sacks. I darted this way and that along the platform. Somehow I always made it back to the train and travelled safely to my parents in Pochinki. I repeated my smuggling activity every five to six weeks for well over nine months.

Even though I was lucky and eluded the trauma of being caught, my brother Heisel and sister Rodel were not so fortunate. Near-disaster came their way one evening.

A narrow escape

The policies of the Bolsheviks and their loathing of speculators, as outlined earlier, indicate some idea of the danger in which we found ourselves on a daily basis. Without the help of Hashem, Heisel and Rodel would have met their death at the hands of these murderers. One New Year's Eve business was excep-

tionally good. Their matches, needles and metal crosses were selling like hot cakes. Suddenly, a burly Russian furiously attacked them, upsetting their trays and throwing the contents into the snow.

"Matches!" he screamed. "You are dangerous terrorists, selling matches." It was obvious that he had been celebrating, for his breath was foul from all the vodka he had been drinking.

"Dirty Zhid speculators!" he yelled. "I am arresting you in the name of the Bolshevik Revolution!"

With a powerful grip, he grabbed Heisel and Rodel. They could not put up much of a struggle as both had been weakened by a lack of proper nutrition. They were also paralysed by the thought that they were at the mercy of the dreaded Gub-Cheka. The sun was already setting in the cold winter sky and there were few people around. It seemed they were hopelessly at his mercy.

One thing, however, gave them hope. Their assailant's speech was becoming increasingly slurred. Heisel struggled furiously, Rodel, on the other hand, fainted. As soon as she fell into the snow the ruffian's grip loosened. She lay in the snow, seemingly unconscious. Heisel now became furious.

"You have killed her!" he screamed. "You have murdered my sister, you drunken lout!" Anger had replaced fear and he struggled fiercely, yelling frantically at the top of his voice.

"Whatever we had in the tray was our own property," he shouted "We did not steal it. You had no right whatsoever to rob and attack us."

Heisel then saw something that gave him courage. Instead of pursuing the struggle, the Russian was using his free hand to unbutton the top of his overcoat. From an inner pocket he pulled out a half-jack of vodka. It was very cold and he badly needed another swig of the fiery liquid. Heisel kept up his resistance, yelling that the man had murdered his sister. Once he got busy with his drinking, the Russian became less and less interested in his zeal for Lenin's revolution.

Russian food ration stamps.

After a while the Russian lost interest in them altogether. Heisel managed to release himself somehow and he and Rodel slipped away from the man and ran into an alleyway nearby.

Afterwards, Rodel confessed that she had not fainted at all! She could have gotten up from the snow quite easily, but had judged it better not to do so. Even so, it had been a traumatic experience for them both. Luckily neither of them had been hurt in any way. They were more vigilant than ever after this episode, but they continued their business in spite of the "Red Terror" and the assault they had experienced.

How we survived

As the war progressed food became very scarce. The grain, mainly rye, became insufficient to feed the population. Besides having to scrape for a living, my mother's inventiveness also helped us to survive. This can be gauged from her ability to bake bread from oats instead of rye, which had become virtually unobtainable. If you know anything about oats you will know that they are good for horses and animals, but not particularly suitable for human consumption. My mother, however, devised a method of removing the spiky, needle-like covering from the oats before grinding them into flour. No small feat, I assure you.

She did something similar with a type of plant called *hirsh* in Yiddish and *pseno* in Russian. It looked like semolina and had a hard, scaly covering. This, too, my mother painstakingly removed, producing a breakfast cereal which could be eaten. My mother, G-d rest her soul, was very resourceful. She arranged a barter system with the local peasants. She would offer the goods we brought from Nizhni-Novogorod for rye grain when it was available and later, as the war progressed, for barley grain.

My mother managed to befriend the wife of the windmill owner. Through this

friendship she was able to get the bits of barley grain ground into flour for bread to feed her precious family. I also remember my mother planting potatoes in our small garden and paying farmers to let us dig out their potatoes. On one occasion, Morris and I were caught digging in a farmer's field without permission and we both received a thorough beating. Some time later my mother managed to procure a cow and some chickens which then supplied us with milk and eggs, and our bellies were satisfied. Because of the war there was a shortage of salt, so my mother substituted a special chemical, which used to melt when the weather was warm.

We stayed in Pochinki for about four years. We continued to receive aid from the American "Joint" and this was supplemented by local relief agencies. We were fortunate in having an additional source of income. We received *passilkes* (parcels) from my mother's brother's wife Stessie, who lived in New York with her husband Lipa Benche (Benjamin). They had not forgotten us. Stessie was a remarkable and generous woman. She heard about our plight and for a long time sent financial and material assistance, which made a big difference to our lives. Her *passilkes* contained clothing suitable for men, women and children. Stessie's attachment to and love for my mother never waned. The clothing she sent us was not available in Russia during the war. Under the supervision of my dear sister Rivel, the garments were altered so that each member of the family had something new to wear.

Stessie and Lipa Benche Shapiro

My brother Abe who was already in South Africa at this stage also sent us money and gave us assistance. He had built himself up financially and was able to send us small sums of English pounds on a regular basis. His monetary contributions helped my parents relax a little and they were able to spend more money on food for us, especially bread which was in short supply.

On Friday, 14 December 1917, corresponding to 29 Kislev 5678, the fifth day of Chanukah, my parents were blessed with a lovely little daughter. As there were no close relatives whose name had to be perpetuated, they named her Perel (Yiddish for Pearl). Her Hebrew name was Pnina, a name soon to be abbreviated to Nina.We were all delighted with her arrival. Bobba Beila, who had travelled with us from Krakenowo, undertook to look after her, as my mother spent most of her time negotiating and obtaining food for her family.

Bobba Beila dies

My father's mother Bobba Beila was in her eighties when we were exiled from our home in Krakenowo. Throughout our long and arduous trek through Russia she was a constant help to my mother and assisted by looking after us younger children, while my mother and father struggled to find food. I remember her as a short old woman whom my mother seemed to tower over. She was very clear minded and seemed very clever and witty.

Bobba unfortunately suffered greatly when we lived in Pochinki. The winter in Russia is long, cold and dangerous, especially for the elderly. Our house was not well built. In the course of time it developed significant defects, particularly where the moss growing between the logs loosened them, causing the planks to fall out and the the soft snow to penetrate. My father tried to repair the damages and cracks, but was not entirely successful. The heat from our oven made the air inside the house very unpleasant and, in Bobba's room, particularly stifling. As time marched on we watched helplessly as she grew weaker. There was

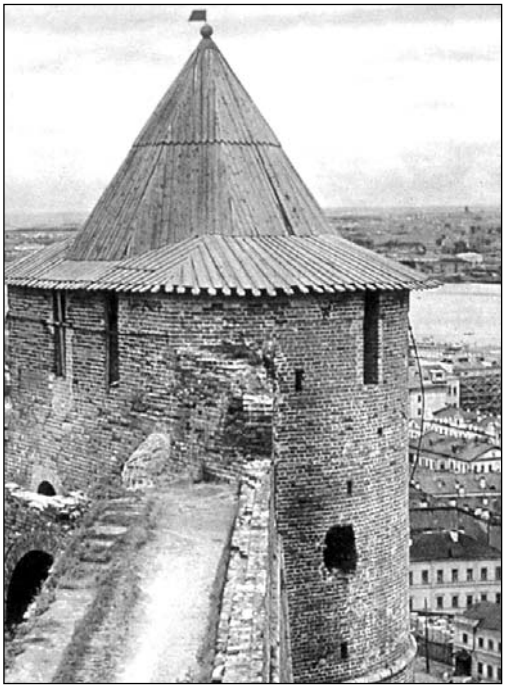
nothing we could do to help her, besides making her comfortable. As time passed, her lungs became damaged and it was not long before she was at death's door. Despite all our care, my mother's particularly, she passed away in Pochinki, before we moved to Nizhni-Novogrod. As far as I can ascertain, she died at the age of 82 years on Friday, 22 December 1918, the shortest day of the year, corresponding to 19 Tevet 5679.

Bobba Beila.

Nizhni-Novogrod

This city was a river port of great importance on the Volga River. It was a meeting place for traders from European Russia and the eastern Siberian regions. The city was renowned for its great fairs (*yeridim* in Yiddish) and traders came from all over Europe to Nizhni-Novogrod to buy and sell on a wholesale basis. From 1835 onward, Jews from the Pale of Settlement were able to obtain special permits to attend these fairs.

The great *yeridim* took place across a bridge 1,5 km across the mighty Volga River. The suburb was called Kanavena. Most of the buildings had large glass windows to display a great variety of goods offered. Many of the beautiful buildings were destroyed during the terrible fighting between the Bolsheviks and the White anti-Communist armies during the Russian Civil War.



The Kremlin Fortress in Nizhni-Novogorod.

During the reign of Nicholas I, the Jewish Cantonists were permitted to set up a permanent community in the city and eventually built a network of schools and shuls. These so-called Cantonists were a special group of extraordinary Jews. They had served in the Russian army for 25 years and were loyal Czarist subjects. By 1900 the Jewish community of Nizhni-Novogrod numbered about 2 500 people, but this number swelled to 10 000 with the arrival of the refugees from the west, exiled because of the war. It is possible that Nizhni-Novogrod was chosen as a destination for refugees because of the loyalty of the local Jewish community.

We move again

After four years in Pochinki the family moved out and settled in Nizhni-Novogrod. This was necessary because the Bolshevik Army, under the command of Trotsky, was gaining more and more victories over the White Army, which sided with the Czar's forces. By this time the Bolsheviks had established themselves as the ruling party in Russia. Various trading ventures, which our family was running, became more dangerous. Only children could trade. My brother Heisel had to hide from the authorities for fear of being forced to go into the Russian army and then being sent to the war front.

Trading became very difficult and adults were continually being arrested as speculators. The family had to come up with another solution to make a living. My father began to make home-made cigarettes while my mother and sisters made a type of toffee called *yeriskes.* Morris and I, being children, were given the task of selling these items. We also peddled old clothes and shoes. Money was so scarce that most of our customers could only afford one cigarette or one *yeriske.* Rodel, an attractive young lady, was able to trade on a little table. She sold cheap jewellery, some fancy goods, as well as light clothing, without being arrested. The Gub-Cheka tended to be lenient with pretty young girls.

PORTAL THREE

The New Krakenowo
1921 – 1933

The Return

The First World War ended in November 1918. It took a further two years before we were sure that we could actually return to Lithuania. On 12 July 1920 a treaty was signed between Soviet Russia and the newly-created Lithuanian Republic. For the first five years of its existence, the Lithuanian Government followed a policy of friendliness towards the Jewish community.

When we returned to our little town Krakenowo in 1921, we were dismayed at the sight that greeted us as we crossed the Neviazhe River on a newly-constructed makeshift bridge. Most houses had been burnt to the ground. We walked around in a daze. Here and there we could recognise the sites of houses in Keidaner Gas. In some places only the cellar of a house remained; the rest of the house was gone. In other streets parts of the walls stood and all around them were heaps of stones and burnt planks. Very little of what remained could be used. In most cases the houses had to be completely rebuilt. The only residential building still standing was the solitary brick house in Krakenowo belonging to Micha Benche Resnick. It too was half-ruined. The upper storey had been destroyed but the ground floor, although damaged, could be repaired quite quickly.

Some families had returned much earlier than us in 1919/20. By the time we arrived in early 1921, a few houses had already been rebuilt. Cherne Stein's house was hardly damaged and her family was able to quickly move back into it. Another completed home was Hirsh Yankel Kruger's house. When we arrived, hungry and tired, my family was divided into two groups. Half of us went to stay with Cherne and the other half with Hirsh Yankel, who was also a cousin of ours. This arrangement did not work out very well and, within a few weeks, we moved once again. This time we went to stay at a nearby hamlet, called the *Treifa Derfel* by the Jews of Krakenowo. It lay just past the Jewish cemetery and was inhabited by Christian families. We had to stay there for almost a year, while uncle Benche's house and our own were being rebuilt by the local peasants.

Strange as it may seem, there was a spirit of optimism in our little *shtetl.* There was neither hunger nor despair. The number of Jewish people living in

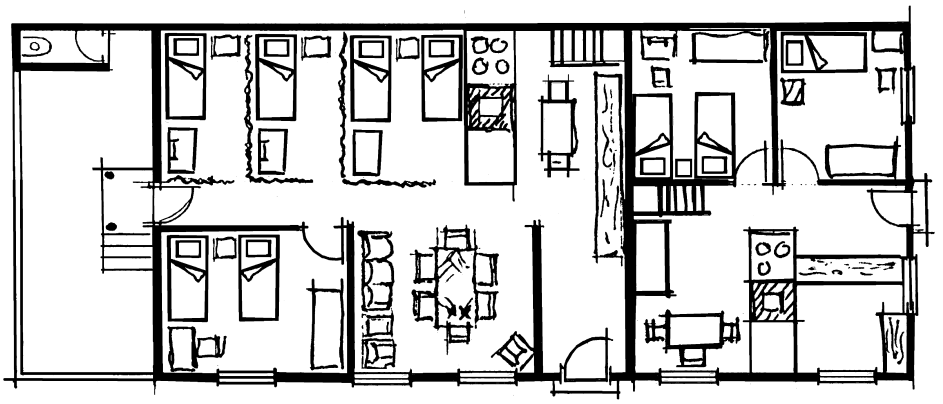
Krakenowo had dropped from fifteen hundred before the war to seven hundred. Many returning Jewish inhabitants had relatives overseas who had left years before and were now able to send money to their less fortunate families. Money came from relatives and *landsleit* in South Africa as well as America. The Czar and his "Black Hundreds" were no more. The threat of pogroms had vanished. Added to that was the fact that Lithuania was now an independent democratic republic. This was encouraging as the initial policy was a desire to join the newly-developed Western World. The Government also wanted to reclaim Vilna which had been brutally captured by Poland. In order to do so the Lithuanian Government thought that American and British Jewry might be helpful. The Government was sympathetic to the Jewish community and there were even Jews in the Lithuanian Parliament.

Rebuilding our house

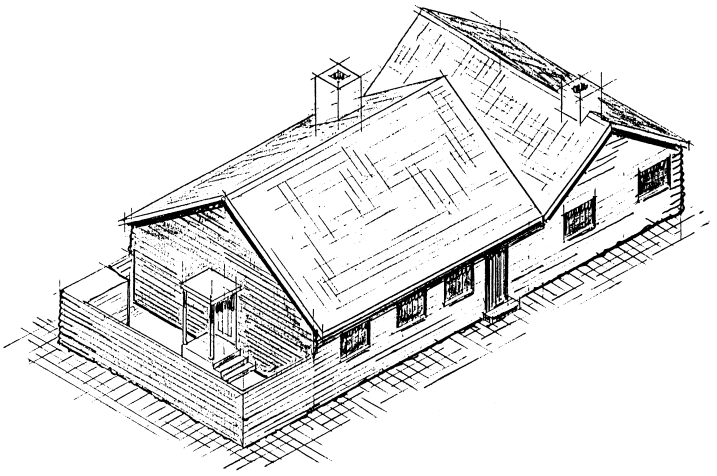
The site of our old house, as well as uncle Benche's half, was only recognisable from the remains of the cellar. The house itself had been burned to the ground during the war. My father managed to buy some pine trees necessary for the rebuilding. These were cut to the right length and flattened at both sides. The shaped wooden logs were then built up into walls. Moss was packed between the lower and upper logs to prevent snow from penetrating and to keep out the cold.

The two adjacent houses gradually began to take shape. We had very little spare cash to finish off the inside, but somehow we managed and the interior was painted. Wooden slats were used to divide up the inside of the houses. The bedrooms were subdivided by hanging sheets, hooked from horizontal planks attached to the ceiling.

Earlier I mentioned how my father had hidden the family silver, brass and copper before we were exiled to Russia. On our return my father and Heisel



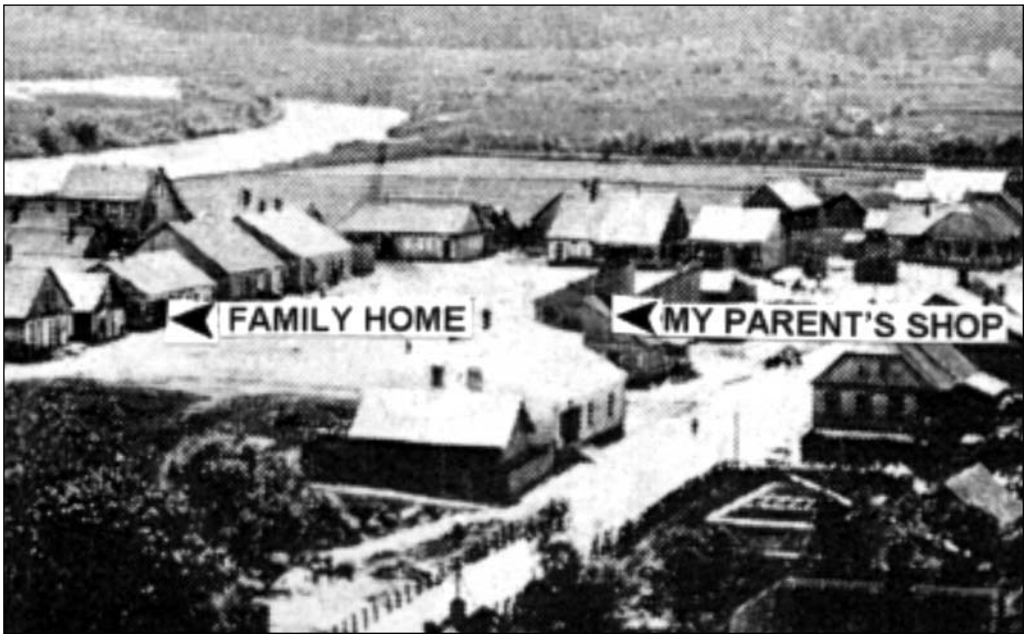
Plan of our house



Perspective drawing of our house.

began the work of recovering them. To their great dismay they discovered that our Lithuanian next-door neighbour had built a lime pit right next to the area where the brass had been buried. Regardless of this situation, the family decided that a hole should be dug where they remembered burying the family items. My father and Heisel first built a fence around our property for privacy and only then began to dig. To our great joy all our valuables were found exactly where they had been hidden. It was a miracle that the neighbours had not dug slightly more to the right, as they would then have found all our precious possessions. By the grace of the Almighty this was not to be and we were able to recover everything.

Re-establishing the shop



Our family home and shop.

My parents managed to rebuild their shop which had also been destroyed during the war. They began trading by selling food products only. As the situation improved they were able to extend the merchandise and incorporate farmers' requisites, especially hardware, into the trading area. The shop was extended to accommodate a *pivneh* which was a separate area set aside for the sale of food and drinks to the local peasants who came to the market area to trade their goods and buy provisions. Vodka, that most famous of all Russian beverages, was of course sold in the *pivneh.* The local peasants and labourers drank their national drink at all times. It made them warm in the bitter cold of winter and relaxed them in summer. They drank before, during and after a job of work, especially on market day. It was just about the only thing in the world that made them happy.

Some Jews drank the fiery liquid and were quite partial to the taste. However, there was a great difference. They only partook at a *simcha* or festival such as Purim or Simchat Torah. There used to be a popular Yiddish ditty sung by everybody. It had four verses. The first three dealt with what made the life of a Jew worth living. It began: "*Geht a Yid in bes medrash arein*" – a Jew goes to the house of study and "catches" a morning *minyan* or *Shacharit.* In the afternoon he goes there again and "catches" a *Mincha* service and learns a *shiur* in *Mishna* and *Talmud.* He also recites a few Psalms and this gives him pleasure. In the third verse he once again goes to shul for *Ma'ariv* and further study. The fourth verse tells about the non-Jew who, by contrast, goes to the *shenk* (bottle store) and begins to booze. He drinks and drinks until he is dead drunk!

Harry emigrates to South Africa

My brother Heisel (Harry) was an excellent student. After mastering *Chumash* and *Tanach* he began *Talmud* studies with local rabbis. At the age of fifteen he could learn *far zich* (by himself) which was a great achievement. As a young boy I remember him studying by the light of a small candle until well after midnight. He ruined his eyes in the process and in later years needed to wear glasses for short-sightedness. My brother was always interested in the world around him and before the outbreak of World War I took up secular studies as well as continuing with his Hebrew work. He was always a great Zionist and participated in youth movements.

Once my parents had re-established themselves in Krakenowo, Heisel felt it was time he left Lithuania and joined Abe, our brother, in South Africa. Great discussions were held about the decision. Letters were sent to Abe asking his opinion. Abe, by that stage, was becoming more established financially

My family in Krakenowo after Heisel left.
Back: Morris, Rodel, Rivel, Sydney.
Front: Sholem Ze'ev, Nina, Chana Sora.

speaking and sent money for Heisel's passage.

In 1922 we all bade Heisel a fond farewell. I was now the oldest son in the family remaining in Krakenowo. I was only thirteen at the time, a man by Jewish law, but I must admit I felt very sad when he left as he was not only my older brother, but my mentor.

A woman's work is never finished

After the war the economic situation in Lithuania was not very good. Once the shop was re-established my parents had to work long hours in order to make a living. My mother was responsible for the snacks served in the small *pivneh.* She was a most energetic lady and her baking skills were famous throughout Krakenowo. Her *bagels* and *bulkes* were delicious, as were her fine *lekach* or cake which she made *mit rozinkes* and *mandlen* (raisins and nuts). Her sponge *torte* which she baked, especially for Pesach as well as other *yomtavim,* was outstanding and I can still recall the taste in my mouth. My mother was

very clever in the kitchen and often utilised the sauerkraut which she had previously stored in large barrels at the end of the summer season. Likewise beetroot and sour cucumbers were also prepared at the end of summer and used throughout the year. A favourite way of eating this food was in conjunction with *bulves* in *peltzlach* or potatoes in their skins. I remember the whole family working with her during the summer holidays to prepare food for the long winter months.

My mother also worked to prepare food for her family. I loved the smell in the house when she baked rye bread at least twice a week and the delicious white *challah* for Shabbat. An average supper consisted of rye bread and salted herrings, with cabbage or beetroot soup to round off the meal. In season my mother made jam from red berries called *bruknes.* This was a luxury item, given to us children as a reward for diligent study or to sick people who were being nursed through an illness. When she could, my mother would give us children a special treat for Friday lunch. She would bake delicious *bulves bonde*, made from grated potatoes mixed with flour and eggs and served on a cabbage leaf. My siblings and I loved to eat this dish with a glass of cold milk.

Shabbos in the Shtetl

Shabbat had a completely different atmosphere. On *Shabbat Kodesh*, the holy Sabbath, we ate white *challah* on a white tablecloth. We had wine for *Kiddush* and ate the three mandatory meals: Friday night, Shabbat lunch and the *se'uda shlishit* between *Mincha* and *Maariv.* Rich and poor alike laboured the whole week to honour this wonderful day. Shabbat was the climax of the week. Was it not *Hashem's* special day when He completed the creation of the world and then rested? Was it not a taste of the Hereafter – of *Olam Habah*?

Preparations for Shabbat started on Wednesday. Sunday, Monday and Tuesday formed the first part of the week. I remember clearly how the days of the week were related to Shabbos. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday were

known as “before Shabbos” while Sunday, Monday and Tuesday were referred to as “after Shabbos”.

My mother would thus begin to put away special food from Wednesday onwards, or she would go to the market and look for special pieces of food for Shabbat. The process would be intensified on Thursday which was market day. She would buy a fat duck or goose for the *cholent,* or she would go the butcher to get a few choice ribs. My mother also prepared the dough for the *challot* on Thursday evening, but only baked them in the big oven on Fridays. My father would heat up the large central oven in the house. He would then place the loaves in orderly rows inside. The large brick oven was, of course, also used to warm the whole dwelling during the harsh winter. It was father’s duty to take out the bread once it was baked. Thursday was also a very busy day in the shop, as the housewives bought their yeast and other foodstuffs from my parents. I do not know how my mother had any energy left by the end of the day!

As if all that work were not enough, until my sisters were old enough to help, my mother would wake up early on Friday morning in order to complete the day’s work. She would clean the house, prepare the Shabbat table, put out the candlesticks (and much much more), all on her own. When my sisters grew up they took over many of the preparations for Shabbat and eased my mother’s life considerably. She was always in a hurry... “Shabbos is coming...the Queen is approaching... hurry, hurry. We must still go to the communal *bod* (bath-house).” Finally, miraculously, all was in place and we boys would go to *shul* with our father while the girls stayed at home with our mother.

Welcoming Shabbat

Two angels, we were told, accompanied us home. The Good Angel would say to the other: “May the next Shabbat not be worse than this one.”If the candles did not shine and the table was not laid, the Evil Angel uttered a curse and an accusation. Every Jewish house that I knew was all bright and beautiful, with faces all washed and shiny.

There was wine in the *Kiddush* cup and the *zmirot* were chanted joyfully. After the most enjoyable meal we finished off with the *Birkat Hamazon* (grace after meals).

The next morning our home was a bustle again. All were dressing in their best clothes to go *daven* and hear the *ba'al kriah lein* the Torah portion of the week and the chazan finishing off the *Mussaf* service. Our *klaus* and *bet medrash* were the spiritual home of our *shtetl,* where all were welcome. After the service we went home to another wonderful meal, consisting of chopped herring, *gefilte* fish, *kreplach* soup and *cholent,* after which we were at bursting point.

The three Hebrew letters of the word for Shabbat form: ***S**heinah **B**'Shabbat **T**a'anug* (a midday snooze on the Shabbat is a real pleasure). It was quiet in the house for everyone was fast asleep or reading.

At *Mincha* all was a bustle again. The third *se'udah* had to be eaten before sunset and the men went off to *daven* and listen to a *droshe* by the rabbi or a *shiur* by the *Chevra Talmud*. We had two rabbis: Rabbi Patasnik who was the more moderate of the two, and Rabbi Zusel Solski, the more devout. As soon as the sun set and three stars were visible in the sky, the beautiful holy day ended. The hard weekdays had recommenced. We greeted each other with the traditional *gute woch* or a *gezunte woch* ("Have a good week; have a healthy week").

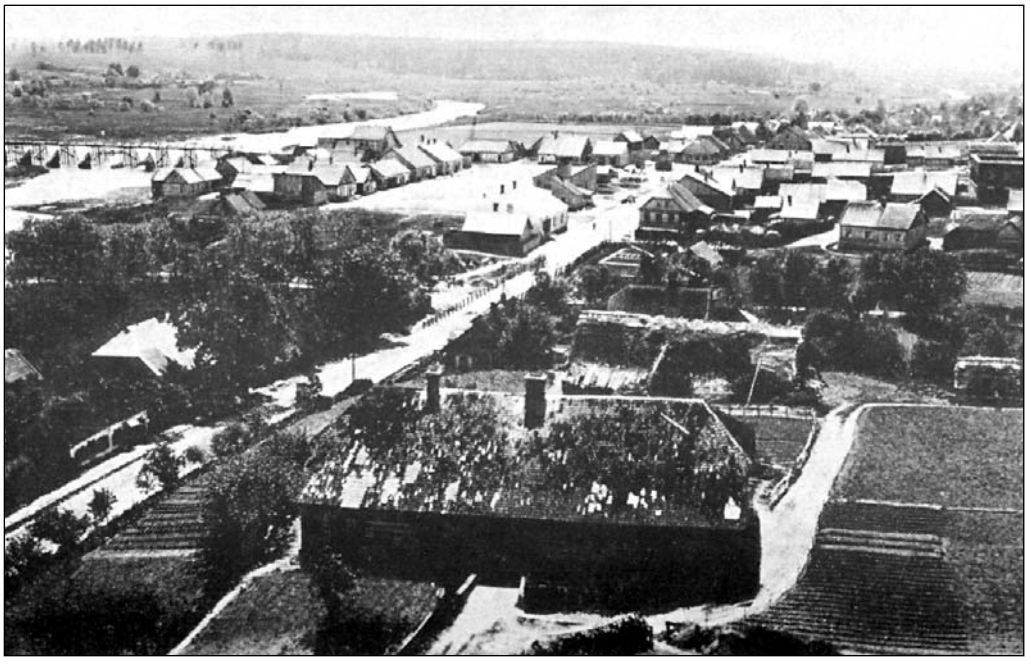
A new community arises

Once most people had returned from the Russian exile, a new *Kehilla* Committee was elected. Percy Zelikow, a friend of mine who later settled in Johannesburg, wrote in the Krakenowo Diamond Jubilee Brochure:

> "I often had the opportunity of listening to their deliberations and discussions. The *tongeber* (main speaker) was Moshe Aaron Rabinowich, a miller who lived just out-

side the *shtetl.* He was the brain and leading intellect, and, during the voting, in committee, one could frequently hear 'I vote the same as Moshe Aaron'. Quite typical was the *balabos* who did not have the ability to concentrate and in most cases did not know what the discussions were about. Nor was there any need for him to break his head about it. Whatever opinion Reb Moshe Aaron happened to hold was good enough for him.

"One of the tasks of the *Kehilla* was the mobilisation of foreign aid. It had to turn to the Krakenowo Landsmanschaften in New York, Johannesburg and other places for financial aid to build a *bod* (public bath-house), to reconstruct the burnt-down *bet medrash* and to supplement the rabbi's salary which the community could not carry itself. I recall, as a little boy, slanting over the shoulder of a young man who, seated at a table in our house, was writing a long and flowery letter in a beautiful calligraphic handwriting to America for funds for some cause. The young man who made such an impression on me, both with his intelligence and with his handwriting, was the late Chaim Gershater. As it turned out, writing was destined to be his life's career. He later emigrated to South Africa and became one of the foremost Zionists in the country. He was also the editor of the Jewish newspaper the *Zionist Record*."



Krakenowo – about 1925

Characters and personalities

In the Diamond Jubilee Brochure Itzke Gel tells us that every *shtetl* in Lithuania had its share of colourful characters:

> "In my home town there was hardly a Jew who was not given a nickname of some sort. Here is a list of some of the names: Yoshe der Noz (nose), Leibe die Pilve (big stomach), Shaia di Katz (the cat), Archiek der Kaiser and Archiek der Grek (Greek), Yankel der Paps (Pope), Avremke der Mamzer (illegitimate), Elke der Poier (peasant), Shmulke die Shau (shoe), Shifra die Paveh (peacock), Dovid die Pipke (pipe), Gershon der Tzigene Ek (tail of a goat), Shlome die Almona (widow), Tzalke der Parch (hair patch), Lipkeh der Komet (comet), Peisach der Pozcharnik (fireman), Dovid der Pastuch (shepherd), Mayer der Uradnik (policeman), Eedel der Chochem (clever one), Itze der Soldat (soldier), Avrohom der Kofetirnik (confectioner), Motte-Shlomo der Kozak(Cossack), Moshe Sholem der Leiter (ladder), Itzkeh der Burlak (ruffian), Knale der Papuz (papoose), Leizer der Broit-Gebber (bread-winner), Grune Kratz (scratching), Yisroel-Shmulke der Laichter (candlestick) and Abele Bau (builder)."

One of the *shtetl's* most interesting characters was Lazar Grazutis. He was married to Chana, my friend Percy Zelikow's sister. Unfortunately, he did not survive the Holocaust and perished in the Kovno Ghetto. He was an intellectual, par excellence. He was acknowledged as our "Poet Laureate". He was also the general secretary of the local Jewish credit bank and at one time the director of the school committee. In addition, he was the secretary of the Kehilla, the democratically elected community council. His brother-in-law Percy Zelikow wrote this fascinating vignette about Lazar:

> "Among these three institutions, there was a regular exchange of correspondence, dealing with their various negotiations and transactions. As general secretary of all three institutions, Grazutis would often have the peculiar task of writing letters to himself. Being a man with a brilliant sense of humour, he would sometimes, for sheer devilment, incite some committee member against the secretary of one of the other institutions to which he gave his divided services. In his wrath, the committee member would be heard to say, in rather strong language: 'Write him a letter and tell him, the so-and-so'."

The 'Kehilla' council 1924.
BACK ROW: Shlomo Zuisa (builder), a rich man, Lazar Grazutis, Heisel Katzeff's son, Zusman Uzvolk. FRONT ROW: Unknown, Percy Zelikow's father (blacksmith), unknown, Chaim Hirsha (shoemaker), Orchik Grek (businessman)

Krakenowo cultural life

The *bet sefer* (school) was one of the centres of cultural activity in our *shtetl.* I fondly remember the many Purim *shpiele* (plays) that were staged. All the would-be actors and performers would practise for weeks beforehand.

The Jewish Public Library was a magnet for the youth in our little town. The library was the centre of our desire to have news from the outside world. Without its newspapers and modern books in Yiddish and Hebrew, we would

Purim "shpiel" (Morke Varkel is on the extreme right)

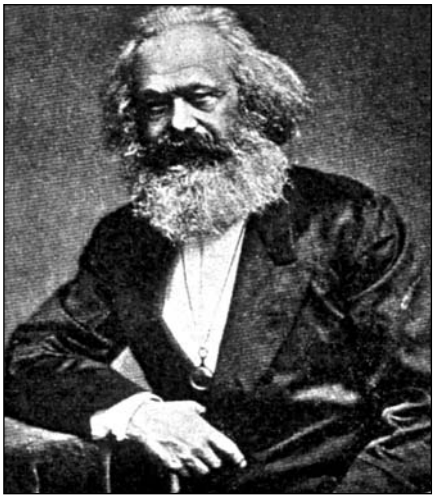
have been cut off from civilisation. Translations of the classics from Russian, English, French and German literature were all to be found on the shelves. The young, eager readers soon became familiar with Sir Walter Scott's *Talisman* which told the story of Richard the Lionheart and how he was cured from his battle wounds by the famous Jewish doctor. The story is based on the legend of Saladdin, the Saracen leader who defeated the Crusaders in the Holy Land and who was responsible for sending Maimonides to King Richard.

Nearly all the books of Count Leo Tolstoy, Pushkin and Dostoevsky were available in Yiddish and Hebrew. Scientific works were also available in translation.

The Yiddish newspapers included the Lithuanian daily *Folk Shtimme* and the Jewish press from the USA. From the latter, we got the latest news about the current movies. The ladies in particular knew all about Al Jolson and his song *Sonny Boy*. They also knew he was the son of a *chazan* and had made it in the world of Hollywood.

One of the favourite serialised novels in the Yiddish daily was the *Daughter of King Saul*, written by a famous novelist, Shaul Shapir. It told the love story of Michal who was promised to the heroic David as a reward for his triumph over Goliath the Philistine. Shapir went on to become the most prolific of all Yiddish novelists in the period between the two world wars.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky



Karl Marx

Hebrew lecturers often visited our town. They spoke on a variety of subjects, and were not restricted to Zionist thought alone. The greatest of these was Ze'ev Jabotinsky; even Menachem Ussishkin was not his equal.

In those days, Marxist ideology was also making huge waves in the world. The Czarist Empire had, of course, fallen to Bolshevik rule. In several other countries in Eastern Europe, like Rumania, the Jewish Communists were coming to the fore. Ana Pauker became one of that country's leaders after starting her career as a Hebrew teacher. She was a fiery speaker and a charismatic leader. She was continually in and out of Rumanian prisons, but eventually became Prime Minister many years later. We knew about the other Communist leaders as well. In Russia Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev were becoming famous. Trotsky and his Red Army had won the civil war against the anti-Semitic White Army, led by pogromists like Petlura and Denikin. We discussed Bela Kun, who had been a Communist dictator in Hungary in 1919. The young Krakenowo "politicians" would even argue about the minutiae of the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx and his interpretations of history. Our *shtetl* was "with it", the fate of nations and continents was "decided" by our various debating societies.

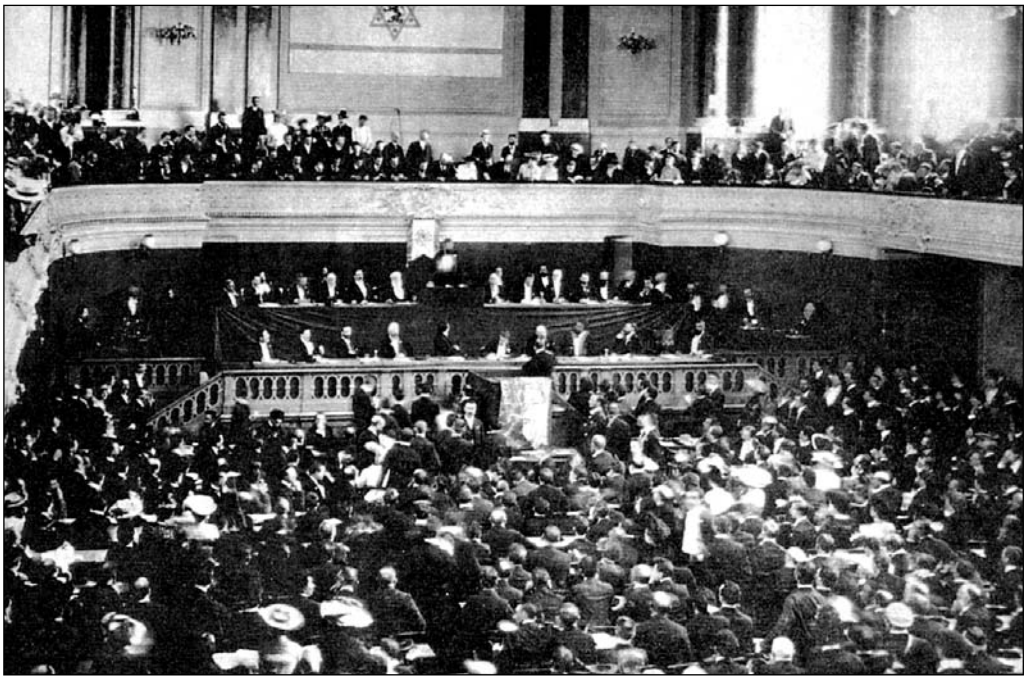
The library was not only a place where books were borrowed. It also served as a club where the young people of the town would meet in the evening to discuss the books that we were reading, and current events in the Jewish world.

‘Haskalah’ and Zionism

The Jewish community of my youth was not monolithic. Members lived in peace with one another, but they were divided as to their path into the future. In the time of my great-grandfather, Yehuda Leib Ziv (1800-1896) every Jew made Torah his ideal. Its study was a sacred task. Every father wanted his son to be a *rav* or at least a *talmid chacham* (scholar). The nineteenth century witnessed a split in the religious Litvak community between the *chassidim* who followed the Baal Shem Tov and the *mitnagdim* who continued to follow traditional customs. The powerful influence of the Gaon of Vilna proved decisive on the Litvaks following the *mitnagdi* philosophy. He established methods of Talmud study which are still operative in Telz Yeshiva in the USA and Ponevez Yeshiva in Israel to this day.

When my grandfather Yehoshua (Heisel Ziv) grew up in the 1830s, a new wind had begun to blow in from the west. It came from the Germany of Moses Mendelssohn. It was called *Haskalah* or Enlightenment. It carried in its wake something that my father Sholem Ze’ev (born 1870) called *treif.* In Berlin it led to Reform congregations, assimilation and *selbst hass* (self-hatred). In Lithuania it gave birth to two distinct Jewish movements: Zionism and Bundism. Both of them attracted thousands of members. Each movement now made a great deal of noise.

By the time my father was 27, modern Zionism had begun and the first Zionist congress was held in Basle, Switzerland. Like many others in the *shtetl,* he was greatly influenced by Herzl’s movement and became an ardent follower. My eldest brother Abe was born in the year that Theodor Herzl witnessed the anti-Semitic trial of Alfred Dreyfus in France. Herzl’s reaction was to write *Judenstadt* or “Jewish State” in 1895. Herzl’s dream was of course realised in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel. My brother Harry was a keen follower of Zionism and used to participate in organisations to promote the love of Israel among the young generation before our Russian exile. He continued this activity when he returned to Krakenowo.



Zionist conference.

Zionist activity in our shtetl

As mentioned earlier, the youth of Krakenowo would often gather in the local library, and these meetings soon became the focus of Zionist activity. Visitors from the bigger cities (Kovno, Ponevez and Shavel), regularly came to speak to us about Palestine and the *chalutzim* (pioneers). Films were shown depicting how the swamps were drained and how the sand dunes were being turned into settlements and cities. One particular show, *Zot Ha'aretz* ("This is the Land") held us spellbound. Tel Aviv at that time was still a very small town,

Praying at the 'Kotel' at the turn of the century.

but its growth was assured. Jerusalem and its holy places were portrayed in black and white. The Kotel (Western Wall, previously Wailing Wall) was shown, but did not look very impressive. Today it seems an imposing structure, with a very large plaza in front of it where hundreds of worshippers, from all parts of the world, come to visit every day. However, the scenes we saw on the screen were of a long, narrow alleyway, cramped and uncomfortable because of the Arab hovels facing onto the wall, no more than a few metres away.

The film also showed the great white snow-bound Mount Hermon, seen on the horizon as the filmmaker travelled north. Our eyes stared in wonder at the sheer beauty of what we saw. We saw orange groves and vineyards of the Emek, and our mouths watered. We envied the road-builders and the masons who were working with the stones from which every house in Jerusalem, the Holy City, had to be constructed. In Palestine it was hot and beautiful. We looked out through the windows and saw the mud, slush and ice which was our lot in Lithuania. The gloom around us was all the more miserable and saddening because of the light that shone from Zion. Suddenly, however, someone with a mouth organ or an accordion would play *Hava Nagila* and boys and girls would

Zionist fund-raising ticket

help him build
PALESTINE
העלפט אים בויען ארץ ישראל
KEREN HAYESOD – קרן היסוד
(PALESTINE FOUNDATION FUND)
SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF TRAVEL IN THE HOLY LAND
FOR LO THE WINTER IS PAST THE RAIN IS OVER AND GONE
THE FLOWERS APPEAR ON THE EARTH THE TIME OF THE SINGING
OF BIRDS IS COME AND THE VOICE OF THE TURTLE IS HEARD IN OUR LAND
COME TO PALESTINE

Early advertisements for Palestine.

jump up and begin dancing the *hora* with wild abandon. We imagined ourselves in Tel Aviv or on a kibbutz in the Emek valley.

The foundations laid by Herzl and Woolfson gave us much to talk about and a great deal of hope for the future. We could not get over the fact that England had, at the height of the war in 1917, issued the Balfour Declaration. At the time nobody paid any attention to the strange wording of this document. Our perception was that England had promised to give us the Holy Land, so long abandoned and in the hands of the Arabs.

We all felt that just as our forefathers had returned and eventually rebuilt the *Bet Hamikdash*, so we too would soon (very soon) go to Israel. What is more, the Messianic era was unfolding before our eyes. We were very naive. The British Administration in Palestine was not exactly all that friendly towards the *Yishuv*, the Jews who had already settled in Palestine and the *chalutzim* who were coming to drain the swamps and build the new settlements and towns. Everyone knew that a completely Jewish city was arising out of the sand dunes outside Jaffa; the city of Tel Aviv. What was not so clear to us was the danger that was lurking: Arab enmity and British duplicity.

Bundists

There was another "wing" in our *shtetl* – the anti-Zionist secular Jews, the Bundists. They were people who belonged to the Jewish socialist party founded in Russia in 1897. Over time it became associated with Yiddish culture, since it was through the medium of Yiddish that the doctrines of the party were promulgated. Bundists rejected Zionism as well as traditional Jewish religious practices, preferring to align with Communist thought. Their members were mostly from the sons and daughters of the working class.

In sports and games, both sides co-operated to an extent. Soccer was by far the most popular sport and leagues were organised on a local and even a national level. Soccer matches, however, were often turbulent. Tempers were quite easily lost and fistfights would result at the end of the game.

I quote here from Percy Zelikow's article in 1961:

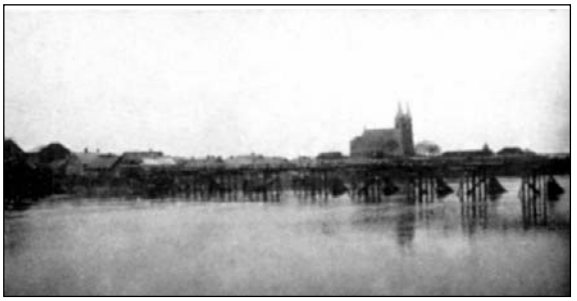
> "I remember a soccer match that took place between the teams of Krakenowo and Remigole. The game was keen and fierce, with the inevitable fistfight towards the end.

One of the Krakenowo soccer teams. I am lying down on the left.

Whilst the attack was first directed against the referee, it later developed into a free-for-all, involving both players and spectators. Let it be said to the credit of both Krakenowo and Remigole, that order was eventually restored, tempers were cooled off, and a very amicable settlement was arrived at – a settlement which satisfied both sides, though it was rather unorthodox and probably unequalled in the history of soccer. It was agreed that the goal in dispute be shared equally by the opposing teams, and both Krakenowo and Remigole happily rejoiced with a final even score of $2^{1}/_{2}$ - $2^{1}/_{2}$."

The River

The River Neviazhe flowed through our *shtetl.* The river was put to commercial use for a great part of the year. The rivers of Lithuania, like those in North America and elsewhere, were used by timber merchants. Many Lithuanian Jews were involved in the timber trade.



The Neviazhe river in flood (about 1920). The bridge and village are in the distance.

Before World War I they used to tender for the baron's forests. The *poritz,* as he was known, was paid a handsome annual amount up front. The Jewish timber merchant then hired labourers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to cut the trees down and shape them into logs.

The logs were then floated down the river to a seaport and from there they were exported abroad. There were many Jews all over Eastern Europe who took up this business and became quite wealthy as a result.

The Neviazhe river in 1992, taken on the bridge overlooking the village.

For us boys the Neviazhe was a source of great fun. In summer it served as a bathing resort. Jews came to swim on Thursdays, while the gentiles came on Sundays. In mid-winter, it was iced over and became the local skating area. Almost everyone who had the means owned a pair of skates and sooner or later took a liking to the sport.

The Gypsies (Tzigainer)

One of my earliest memories as a young boy is that of the Gypsy visits to our *shtetl.* These colourful wanderers were known in every country in Europe. Before World War I in particular, their migrations extended to the Middle East and even North Africa. They were the greatest nomads of modern history. They came in their caravans, wagons and on horseback. They were a swarthy race who generally came to Lithuania in the summer months. They sold herbal medicines, coloured beads and gemstones. Their women offered silk kerchiefs and exotic ribbons. The men were expert horsemen and sold saddles, leather wares and carriage equipment. The moment they pitched their tents, their fortune tellers set up special cubicles. The *katerintzik* or organ grinder, was usually part of the group and he would grind out his music and would often have a dancing bear or monkey accompanying him.

The Gypsies were notorious burglars and even kidnappers. Whenever they

passed through a *shtetl,* anything that was not nailed down could disappear in a jiffy. Shirts and linen sheets from washing lines were gone before you could say *shema Yisrael*. They were exceptionally daring. The little ones were trained to sneak in and out of houses like lightning. The women were capable of coming in to ask for a drink of water and then beating up the housewife and stealing whatever they fancied: jewellery, teapots, even a samovar. It was no good reporting them to the police. Everybody knew that once an object was gone it would never be found again. They were in and out in no time. They travelled fast and nobody knew where they came from or where they disappeared to. The Gypsies had a reputation for being the best horse-thieves in the business. They were also adept at stealing sheep, goats and even calves! They converged on the *shtetl* from different directions. Pursuit always ended in failure. Their gangs met at some rendezvous in the dead of night and there they shared out their ill-gotten gains and regrouped to bewilder their pursuers. They were particularly good at changing the appearance of an animal. A white mare in the care of one of their experts could become black, piebald or any other colour, in no time at all.

The following is a story that was repeated many times in my youth. It happened in one of the *shtetls* and was probably quite true. After one of the Gypsy visits to a *shtetl,* one of the local children, Yossele Levy, was found to be missing. His parents were beside themselves with anxiety. Yossele had gone to the river with some of his friends, but by sunset all the children were back except for Yossel. A search party went to look for him, but he was nowhere to be found. The police and firemen were then alerted, but they knew from bitter experience that if he had been kidnapped by the Gypsies, the search would be hopeless. They gave chase to the band of Gypsies, but came back empty-handed. As you can imagine, the Jewish community was in an uproar. The *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark) in the shul was opened and the community offered up *tefillot* to *Hashem.* They repeatedly recited *tehillim* (psalms) and even considered a communal fast. Nobody could think of a solution to the problem.

In this particular *shtetl*, there lived a man by the name Berele Mamzer. He was a most unsavoury character. In Hebrew, a *mamzer* is pejorative and indicates that the person was born of a forbidden union (adulterous or incestuous) and is not a "kosher" Jew. Berele was in fact a *ganef* (thief) and a notorious horse-thief to boot. He belonged to a gang which had connections with a variety of nefarious characters in the underworld. However, he was a Jew at heart, though not a practising one. Despite all his sins and misdemeanours, he felt *rachmones* (compassion) for the Levy family. Yossel was

Gypsy on his horse

their only child and everyone knew that he was born in the tenth year of their marriage. The husband and wife loved each other very much and had chosen to stay together even though after ten years of a childless marriage they could have had the option of divorce allowing the husband to remarry and fulfil the first mitzvah in the Torah, *Pru urevu* ("Be fruitful and multiply").

On that fateful day, Berele made a sudden and unexpected appearance in the crowded shul. Everyone wondered why he had come. He usually only attended for the Kol Nidrei service or just to hear the shofar and was in fact an *epikores* (a non-believer). So why had he come on this particular day? When the hubbub subsided, Berele made an announcement and a promise: "Yidden," he said, " leave it to me – *ich vel dem kind gefinen* (I will find the boy)."

The crowd was thunderstruck. "How? When? What could this ruffian do?"

Berele Mamzer was as good as his word. A week passed and he returned with Yossele Levy. Not a hair on the child's head had been harmed. Nobody ever found out why his rescuer undertook what must have been a dangerous venture. He asked for no reward and confided in no-one. The rescue must have taken a lot of courage and not a little money. Shortly thereafter, this brave hero disappeared. Some said he went off to America. Others believed he had been murdered. Still others heard he had been caught stealing horses from the Russian cavalry and had been sent to Siberia. Nobody knew for certain. The Mamzer was gone, but the legend of his courage lived on.

The Lithuanians also spoke about the Gypsies. I do not remember much Lithuanian, but I do recall is a short sentence in Lithuania regarding the Gypsies: *Pas Michalas Bencha pomala komalo, kosina, Zieder or Tzigainer.*

From Micha Bencha Resnick a filly was stolen. Imagine who could have done it: a Jew or a Gypsy?

The family grows up

Schooling – what to choose?

The political upheavals that followed World War I brought radical changes to education in Eastern Europe. In Russia, the Revolution cut off Russian Jewry from the rest of the world and suppressed both Jewish religious and Hebrew-nationalistic education. Yiddish was recognised as the language of the Jews by the authorities, but Yiddish education was discouraged. Up until the war Lithuania fell under Russian control. However, after the war Lithuania became one of the newly-established states that had resulted from the spoils of war and was able to formulate its own education policies.

At the same time, the Balfour Declaration (1917) was issued and the idea of a Jewish State became a near-reality. The Zionist fervour strengthened the Hebraist movement in both the secular and religious groups. Jewish cultural life became very strongly politicised and schools were controlled or sponsored by Jewish political parties.

The extreme Orthodox, non-Zionist elements resorted to a passive withdrawal into traditional life and only slightly modified their schools to meet contemporary needs. The Orthodox Agudat Israel supported the *Horev* schools which included *cheders, talmudei torah* and *yeshivot,* where both general and Jewish subjects were taught. A network of schools for girls was established by Sarah Schnirer who noted that education for girls had been neglected. These developed into the *Bet Yaacov Schools*.

The Mizrachi Zionists sponsored the Yavneh network, which included kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools. A major difference between the Agudah and Mizrachi schools was their attitude to the use of the Hebrew language. The Agudah taught in Yiddish while the Yavneh schools with their Zionist philosophy, accepted Hebrew as the language of the desired Jewish national home.

Another development was the *Tarbut* schools. These were orientated to *chalutziyut* (pioneering) in Palestine. The Bible was the core of the Hebrew traditional programme and modern Hebrew literature was also studied.

Schooling in Krakenowo

In Krakenowo the Hebrew language was coming to life. It was now not only heard in prayers in the *bet medrash*, but Eliezer ben Yehuda's example of reviving this ancient language was being followed by a strong group of young people. Even more significant was the opening of the *Bet Sefer Ivri* where, in addition to Yiddish, *Ivrit b'Ivrit* methods of teaching, were introduced. This school was affiliated to the *Tarbut* educational network. This policy was enthusiastically implemented by a new generation of teachers.

Tarbut was destined to play a very significant role in the lives of East European Jewry between the two World Wars. It affected the life of the Jewish youth profoundly. Elementary schools existed in every *shtetl.* Eventually the influence of *Tarbut* educational methods was also felt in the *cheder*, an area of traditional Jewish education. During the years after the First World War, the school curriculum in Lithuania was modernised so that spoken Hebrew could be accommodated. In addition to *Chumash* and *Rashi*, secular subjects such as arithmetic, science, geography and history were now also taught. This was a departure from the old system and had definitely not occurred prior to the outbreak of World War I.

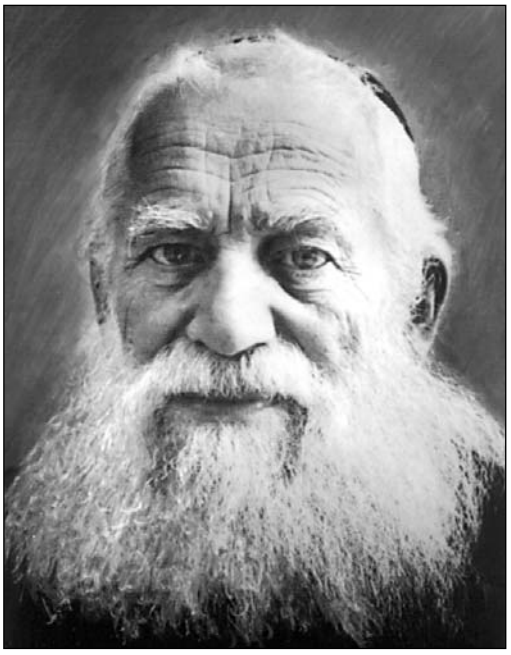
The old system of preparing a boy for one of the big yeshivot of Telz, Ponevez, Slabodka and Kelm was not abandoned altogether. In the large towns where the yeshivot were housed, the gymnasia system was arising side by side with the Talmud institutions. It was therefore "safer" to provide the pre-bar-mitzvah boys with a modern dual education. Once the youngsters had completed their primary schooling, the family could then make a choice as to how the child's education should develop.

The choice between the two systems was never an easy one. To finance a son at either a gymnasium or a yeshiva was an expensive undertaking. In either case, board and lodging would have to be arranged. The decision was therefore not made on religious grounds alone. I knew quite a few families who had relatives in Keidan and Shavel and, with accommodation thus available, they took the secular option.

To send a boy to Ponevez or Kelm was also not easy, but the yeshiva system has always been geared to assist boys in poor circumstances. *Essen teg* (eating days) was a system as old as time. The yeshiva arranged for the townsfolk to offer three meals a day, on one or two days a week. The boys who could not

afford to pay for meals were sent to different people's homes on different days. In the Ponevez Yeshiva, lunch was served in the basement cafeteria to ease the burden of *essen teg*. On Shabbat there was hardly ever a problem. Almost every *balabos* could be relied on to offer the three mandatory meals – *shalosh se'udot* – to a yeshiva *bocher.* When the great festivals came round, nearly all the boys went back to their home towns to be with their families.

RABBI KAHANEMAN



For those who desired a rabbinic education there was the famous Ponevez Yeshiva, just 30 kilometres away. Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman was making a name for himself not only in Lithuania, but world wide. He founded the modern Ponevez Yeshiva, housed in an enormous place, funded by money he had received from the philanthropist Rabinowitz. The rav used to travel all over as a "super-*meshulach*". He was an outstanding fund-raiser and his journeys in this regard took him to England, North and South America, and South Africa where he had a brother in Johannesburg.

In later years, Rabbi Kahaneman established the Ponevez Yeshiva in Bnei Brak near Tel Aviv, which prospers to this day. This same rabbi built his famous junior and senior yeshivot in Ponevez which attracted boys from all over Lithuania and further afield.

My own education

Education has always been one of the primary concerns of Jewish parents. Even in our Russian exile, when my parents struggled to make ends meet, they still arranged for us to have an education, especially in the religious sphere. My first teacher was my brother Heisel Leib (Harry). He had studied in the great Ponevez Yeshiva and had it not been for the disruptions of World War I, he may have been ordained as a rabbi. He taught Morris and I to read the *siddur,* to *daven* properly as well as how to write. Later on he began to teach us *Chumash* and the *trop* (tune) for chanting the *sedra* of the week. Heisel was a good *Talmudist* and an excellent teacher. As a result of his efforts we were able to keep up with classes and even overtake the others when we returned to Krakenowo in 1921.

On our return from Russia, we studied in the local *Bet Sefer Ivri*. Our younger sister Nina joined us at a later stage and we all completed the fifth class. In my last year at that school, with only six pupils in the class, we even began to study *Talmud*.

My health had not been good since the exile to Russia; I was undernourished and had trouble with my lungs. A local doctor advised my mother to put me on a special diet with lots of milk and cream. In the course of time I recovered fully. I was able to play soccer and played in several positions – as a fullback, centre forward and later as a goalkeeper.

I finished at the local school and because my family were keen Zionists I opted to further my studies at the Tarbut High School in Keidan which was 30 kilometres away. I was about 14 years old when I arrived at the Gymnasium. I completed the equivalent of standard eight at this school. I boarded at the house of Reb Chaim Behr, my mother's cousin for some six or eight months. However, I was not happy and soon decided to move out. I made many friends at the Gymnasium. One of them was a boy named Setung. Nicknames were popular among the Litvaks and it was not long before he was given the nickname "Stunk" which was hardly a flattering nickname! In any event he was a friendly and hospitable fellow and I moved in with him and his family for some 12 months. This was a happy time in my life.

My sister Rodel Leah

There were five years between Rodel and myself. She was born in 1904 and was the first girl of the family. Rodel was educated in the local school in Krakenowo where she learned to read and write in Yiddish and even learned some Russian. She was only eleven years old when we were exiled to Russia which curtailed her formal education. While in Russia she was a great help to my mother, who had to find food for her family as well as make some sort of living. By the time she was fifteen she was old enough to help the family eke out a livelihood. As I have said earlier, she and Heisel went ahead of us to Nizhni Novogorod and earned money by setting up a table and selling small trinkets as well as smuggling household items back to us while we were still in Pochinki.

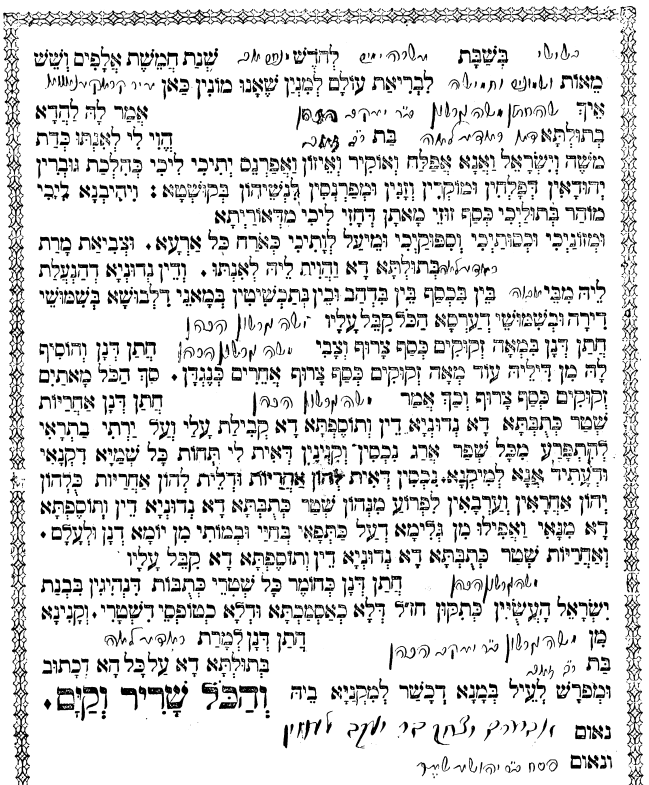
Rodel gets married

When we all returned to Krakenowo in 1921 Rodel helped our parents in their shop. She was a beautiful young girl and had many boyfriends. Among them was Moshe Gershon Resnick who was determined to marry my sister. He proposed to her and a family discussion took place as to whether she should accept him. I must confess here that my father did not favour the *shidduch*. There were several reasons for this. Both Moshe Gershon and his father Reb Yankel, were butchers. In the small community in which we lived, being a butcher was not considered a good profession and carried very little *yichus* (status). My father also regarded the young man to be somewhat of a hard character who appeared to have a jealous nature. However, times were not easy for our

family and the *chossen* was making a good living. My parents were therefore not so eager to reject the offer. The wedding took place on 31 July 1925, corresponding to 10 Av 5685.

My parents spent a great deal of money on the wedding and reception. The traditional *sheva brachot* took place in different homes. In those days the idea of a honeymoon was not even considered. Soon after the wedding, Moshe Gershon's true personality came to the fore and his jealous nature surfaced. He began to torment Rodel if she as much as smiled at or spoke to other people, especially men. He continually accused her of being unfaithful, which greatly distressed my sister.

On 15 April 1926, Rodel gave birth to a son whom they called Bezalel or Chalke in Yiddish. When we eventually emigrated to South Africa, he was fondly called "Charlie" by all.



КЕСУБА. Образецъ брачной записи, для невѣсты-дѣвицы. Съ Виленскаго изданія 1880 года.

ВИЛЬНА. Типографія Вдовы и братьевъ Ромиъ.

Rodel's Ketuba.

The tormented marriage played upon Rodel's nerves and together with the harsh conditions of Russia which had weakened her, she became quite ill after her son's birth. It took many months before she regained her strength. My sister Rivel and I spent a great deal of time looking after our little nephew. I was only released from my "baby-sitting" task when I began preparations to emigrate to Africa. Rivel of course, continued to look after the little one until his mother had fully recovered.

I prepare to emigrate

With my friends – 1926
BACK ROW (from left): Percy Zelikow, Itzik Kier, Zloty Apker, Lazar Tocker, Sydney Seeff. FRONT ROW: Unknown, Benska Mervis, Chaim Friedman, Shimon Pogir.

When I was almost 17, in July 1926, my turn came to leave the town where I was born and go out into a world about which I had read but had never seen. For months before my departure I studied the English language. I was in possession of two books: one was a dictionary, the other a phrase book. The author of these books was Dr Harkavy, a famous Yiddish and Hebrew linguist from America.

I did my "homework" diligently. Each page of the phrase book had three columns. On the left side was the English sentence. I clearly remember the first phrase: "Good morning. How are you?" On the right hand side was the equivalent in Yiddish. The central column was the most difficult to master. It gave, in Hebrew letters, the transliteration. I found it very difficult to learn how to pronounce and memorise each greeting, question and statement.

Transliteration, as I found out much later, is a very complex and difficult process. The English linguistic system has vowels and diphthongs for which there are no Hebrew or Yiddish equivalents. The greeting "good morning" I mastered easily and quickly as it was in fact very similar to my mother tongue *gut morgen* in Yiddish. The next word, however, was much more difficult. The English "how" became the Hebrew letters *hei*, *alef* and a double *vav.* I had no idea how to pronounce this word. I tried "havv" and "hau" and other combinations but I was clearly not getting anywhere. I decided to go to one of my pals who was also preparing for emigration. He had been studying for some time and I considered him an expert. He did indeed clear up the mystery for me and gave me a list of solutions. He explained how the publisher used the Hebrew aleph and vav to indicate the "ow" sound in the English phrase. He also gave me advice on the pronunciation of the English letter "r". It was not always like the Hebrew *reish* as it was much softer in the middle and at the end of a word. Only the initial "R" was the same or similar to the Yiddish. Even then, he added, it was softer.

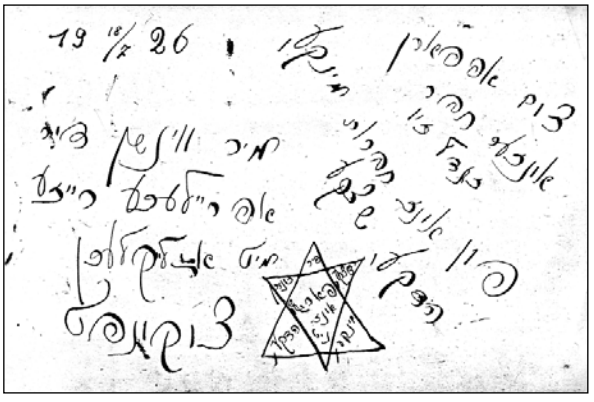
For weeks and weeks I swotted that phrase book. Fortunately I had an excellent memory and was young and enthusiastic. I soon became quite proud of my achievement, especially when the book had been wholly verbalised, absorbed and integrated. What a proud day that was for me!

I say goodbye to my friends

I was very excited at the thought of starting a new life in a new land. I was young and had great expectations of what I would find in South Africa. Before I left, however, I had to go through the sad process of saying goodbye to friends and family.

My friends gave me a farewell party and were upset to see me go. Some of the girls wrote me special messages in a green book which I have kept to this day.

My farewell party.
From left BACK ROW: Chaim Friedman, Sholska the Rabbi's Daughter, Percy Zelikow, Shotska Levin, Simca Pogir, Minke Kier, Chaim Kazen, Heske Feivas.
MIDDLE ROW: Girl From Remegolla, Morris Seeff, Sydney Seeff, Itzik Kier, Lipka Levin, A Shtoomer(dumb). FRONT ROW: Chotke Naidel, Chai Levin, Beilke Shaban, Hodke Naidel, Rokkfe Naidel.



Copy of the message book. 1926: 18 July. We wish you a happy voyage and good fortune in the future. On the occasion of the departure of our friend Zundel Ziv. His friends Minke, Hodke and Shatzke (Kier)

Morris goes to ORT

When I left Krakenowo my brother Morris was completing his primary education. In 1927, after finishing at the local school, Morris chose to study at the ORT Technical School in Kovno (Kaunus). The word ORT is from the Russian acronym for the Society for Manual Labour or **O**rganisation for **R**ehabilitation through **T**raining[2]. It was initiated by a group of prominent Russian Jews during the reign of the liberal Czar Alexander II (1881). The ORT leadership raised one million roubles and began to establish small workshops for trades such as carpentry, tailoring, and light engineering. After World War I, the organisation spread to Germany, Poland and the Baltic States. Between the two wars it became an important international Jewish enterprise. Today the ORT schools and technical colleges exist in Israel as well as throughout the Diaspora, including South Africa where many children, predominately blacks, are being trained. This enables them to find suitable employment after school.

For as long as I can remember, Morris was always tinkering and inventing new gadgets. He loved to work with his hands and would often help my father in the hardware portion of the shop. Three other youngsters from Krakenowo joined Morris at the ORT school in Kovno, they were: Teddy Tocker, Percy Zelikow and Zloty Apkow. The *balabatim* of Krakenowo found it "infra dig" to allow a child to become an artisan. This was made evident by the fact that before leaving the shtetl for Kovno, Morris had

ORT organisation in 1928

[2] Today it stands for Organisation for Research and Technology.

a very good friend called Shimon Resnick. They had been inseparable while at Hebrew school. When Morris came back to Krakenowo during his vacation in 1927, Shimon refused to talk to him. My brother had apparently forfeited his social status by abandoning the middle class and engaging in what some people considered to be *shvartze arbeit* (black labour). He was now looked upon by Shimon as a *baal meloche* (a tradesman or labourer)!

Morris was unperturbed about what others thought about him. He loved the time he spent at the ORT school and was enthusiastic about all the subjects he studied. He learned about welding, machine building and blacksmith work.

Morris in ORT workshop – 1929
FROM LEFT: Shapiro, Korn, Maishke Ziv

Students of mechanical engineering at 'ORT' in Kovno July 1929.
From left BACK ROW: Shapiro, unknown FRONT ROW: Mr Nomberg (instructor) Koren, Chmilevsky, Maishke Ziv, Shapiro, Mr Maylack (lathe instructor), unknown, Mr Olaiskey (director).

Before he completed his course he had to choose an area in which he wanted to specialise. Morris chose tool-making, which remained one of his life's passions.

When Morris began his studies at the ORT school, his intention was always to complete the course and then join his brothers in South Africa. So after his two years in Kovno, Morris returned to Krakenowo to make plans to leave Lithuania and prepare for his journey to South Africa.

Nina chooses Yavneh

Young women at Yavneh

When we returned from Russia, my sister Penina attended the *mechina* (nursery school). She then completed her primary education at the local *Bet Sefer Ivri*. The problem then arose as to where she should complete her education. It was finally decided that she should attend the *Yavneh* school in Ponevez as the instruction was in Hebrew, but there was an emphasis on religious education.

The Yavneh school system was established in 1926 by the Mizrachi Zionist Movement. In time it spread to Lithuania and further afield. Its curriculum and methodology were opposed by the *Agudah*, *Chassidim* and *Chareidim* (ultra-Orthodox) on the right, and the Tarbut schools on the left. For the former groups its system was too secular, while the latter believed it was too *frum* (religious).

The Yavneh schools, like the Tarbut schools, educated their pupils to work for a Jewish national homeland. They taught Zionism and the dream of the return of all Jews to *Eretz Yisrael*. All subjects at the school were taught in Hebrew - arithmetic, mathematics, geography and history. This attitude was an anathema to the members of the Bund. These people were Marxists for whom Trotsky and the Communists in the USSR were busy bringing about a new and wonderful world order! They were anti-Hebrew, anti-religion and anti-Zionism.

Morris and Motke Varkel at the river

My farewell was marked by a friendly get-together. On the other hand Morris's departure from Krakenowo, three years later, was marked by an incident which has now become a favourite family story.

Morris was very friendly with Motke Varkel. Motke was an outstanding young man in every way. He was athletic, an excellent centre forward and the

Motke Varkel

captain of our local soccer team. He was a Zionist intellectual who had no doubt that Herzl's state would one day be a reality. He was also an extremely courageous youngster. Had he succeeded in escaping to Palestine, he would no doubt have become a Palmach leader.

As I mentioned earlier, the Jewish lads used to go swimming in the Neviazhe on Thursdays. One Thursday, Motke, Morris and a younger boy Motke Pogir were diving and splashing in the river. Just then the two Dambrowski brothers, notorious hooligans, came running out of the *wald* (forest). They started throwing sand onto the Jewish boys' clothing. Motke Varkel was incensed and immediately scrambled out of the water and put on his sandy clothes. He showed his fists and, with tremendous energy and concentration, he let them have it.

Morris saw what was going on and rushed out of the river to help his friend. "Get dressed, Maishke," Motke shouted to him. "Don't worry about the sand. You can't fight naked, you'll get hurt." My brother quickly put on his pants and shirt and rushed into the melée. However, he did not come empty-handed. He had a metal shoe-horn in his hand which he now used as a weapon. The two *mems* (Motke and Morris) were too good for the aggressors and the fight was soon over. They had no fear in their hearts for the *goyim*, even though the Dambrowski brothers were older than they were. The third *mem* Motke Pogir was too young and kept out of the fray.

There are two sequels to this story. The one was that these hooligans wanted revenge and particularly wanted to settle the score with Morris who had cut the one hooligan's face open. They came to look for my brother a few days later, but Morris had left, to join his brothers in South Africa.

The other sequel was more tragic and occurred a few years later. When "Operation Barbarossa" began on the 22 June 1941 and the German Army entered Lithuania, the Jew-hating Dambrowski brothers led the Siaulistis, a Nazi sympathiser group. The German army attacked the Russian army and

overran Lithuania in a matter of days. The Lithuanian anti-Semites took over the job of exterminating the Jews. In Krakenowo, they drove the entire Jewish community into the *shul*. The Dambrowskis had good reason to hate Motke Varkel. They told their followers that it would be best to select and remove those Jews who could organise acts of resistance and defiance. You have by now guessed the tragic event that followed. Motke Varkel was one of the first to be hauled out of the *shul*. Behind him some other young Jewish men were made to follow. They may have been the first members of the community to be killed but the fate of Krakenowo was sealed!

Life in Krakenowo in 1930

After Morris left Krakenowo, he maintained a correspondence with his friend Motke Varkel. In July 1930 Motke wrote to Morris expressing how much he missed his friend as well as describing every day life in Krakenowo.

> "You well know that Krakenowo does not have advantages which other *shtetlach* enjoy such as cinema, theatre and electricity. Yet if you asked Reuven the cripple or Yankel the petunker what a talking movie is, I assure you they would be able to explain to you in great detail what a movie is all about. How you may ask? We in Krakenowo are not less privileged than you are in Africa. Our cinema is housed in the local Jewish bank. A movie is shown every Saturday night. The only problem is the same film is shown repeatedly. It was produced by the bank and is called "Our Banking Administration". The actors are the employees and management. Chaitin and Nachman Resnick, the primary school teachers, also act in the show and are depicted as conducting a debate on various topics.
>
> Each viewing of the show is very *heimlich* and *freilich.* The youth especially enjoy watching. The crowd can get very large and there is a lot of pushing and shoving. Those who cannot get in struggle for a place by the window or in the hall. Each one is vying for a glimpse of the antics of each local star. I admit that I have been lucky enough to have seen the movie without paying a single cent.

It grieves me that you are not here in Krakenowo and not only because of the movie story. Things are 'hotting' up in our town. A new bus service which passes through Krakenowo has been started between Ponevez and Kovno. The bus stops for a short while in our town. The bus station is at the Valencia Hotel next to Henech Pogir. When the bus arrives virtually the whole town comes out to welcome friends and acquaintances. They come to see and to be seen! The street becomes congested with young and old. When at last we hear the engine noise of the bus, we have to stand on tip-toe to see who is arriving. The young girls in particular are eager to catch a glimpse of a *fainen bocher* (an eligible young man). The more mature passengers on the bus stare at us as if we were *mishugoyim* (crazy). All too soon the bus driver gives a *fife* (hooter signal), announcing that the bus is about to leave and the bus continues on its journey.

Maishke how I wish you were still here. We would have a lot of fun just as we did before.

I now want to discuss the question of electrification of our *shtetl.* If we held a poll, most people would not vote for it. Why? If you would ask Reuven the cripple and Yankel the petkuner, I assure you they would tell you that before we had a rabbi we were both physically and spiritually in the dark. Now that we have a rabbi – may Hashem grant him health and long years, *biz a hunderd oen tsvanzig* (till 120), we do not need electric light as our leader is capable of 'bringing us light' with his knowledge and brilliance.

I must tell you about the *pristav* (magistrate). The old man has left and a new fellow has arrived who is very conscientious and has made many regulations. He is very keen to improve the town's hygiene. He does not want us to sweep our rubbish into the streets. Instead he is now organising for the rubbish to be collected from our houses. Not only that. He wants us all to see to it that cement paving is installed along the roads before the rainy season commences. When these sidewalks are completed we will be able to shpatzier (stroll) without having to worry about the *blot* (mud).

Finally I want to tell you about our Maccabi organisation. Do you remember that it was temporarily stopped in 1928? Now in 1930 these wonderful young men and women have matured and are working hard to realise their ideal *chazak ve ematz*, (a healthy mind in a healthy body.)

I am full of hope and optimism that the time of emancipation is near. We will, I am sure, adjust to the modern period of life in Europe. I am concluding my writing and promise you that my next letter will tell you even more important and interesting items.

With best regards and wishes for health and strength. All my best wishes to all Krakenowo friends and countrymen."

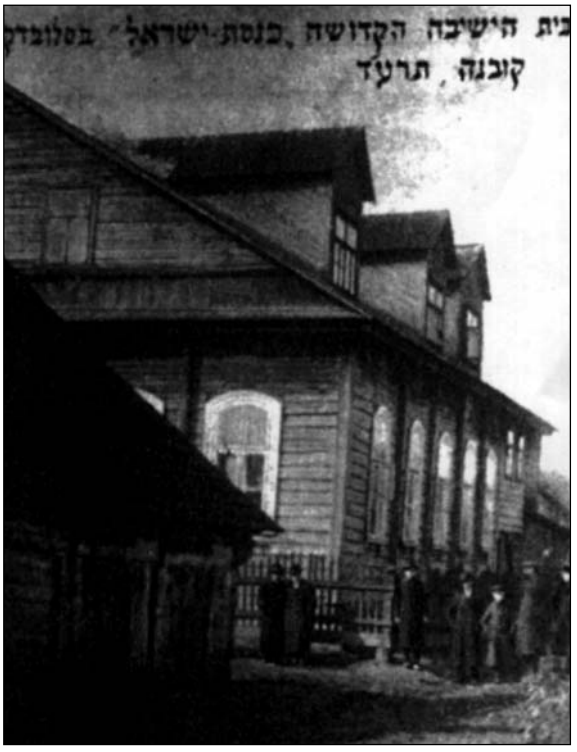
Motke Varkel

Morris did not keep any other letters that Motke sent him. The sad part about it all is that Motke's optimism was unfortunately wrong. He and his family were killed by the Lithuanians in a brutal manner when the Germans occupied our little village.

My talented sister Rivel

Rivel was born on 15 September 1906, two-and-a-half years after Rodel. Her full name was Chaia Rivka, but she was affectionately known as Rivel. She was a gifted person even as a young child. She made excellent progress at *cheder* or *talmid torah* and acquired a good working knowledge of Hebrew. In Pochinki and Nizhni-Novogrod, she also perfected her Russian. On our return to Krakenowo, she became a communal worker and her leadership and wisdom were always much appreciated.

Rivel was good at everything she undertook. In our war-time exile she would often be the one to care for us younger children. She was a skilful

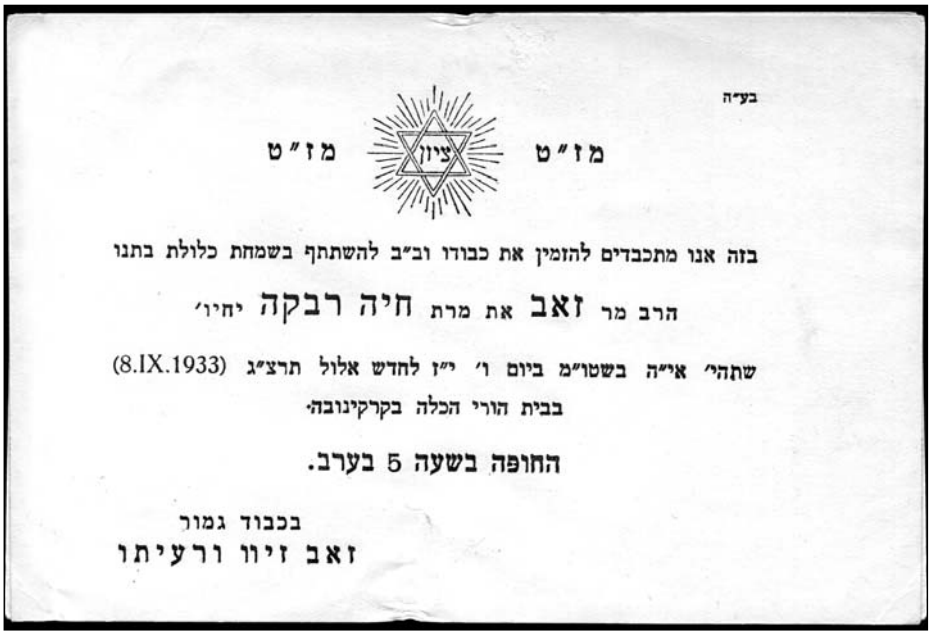


Yeshiva Knesset Yisroel in Slabotka
This is the yeshiva in which my brother-in-law Woolf (Velvel) Kuznec studied.

dressmaker and made clothes for us from the *passilkes* (parcels) we received from America. My sister was forever busy helping my mother with her many chores. In time she became the spokesperson for our Jewish community. I recall that she was also a member of a delegation which represented the *Kehilla* in Kovno. She had a personality people admired. Like everyone in our family, she was an ardent Zionist and from early childhood had a religious outlook.

When Rivel became of marriageable age the *shadchan* (marriage broker) was called in. He had many men to introduce her to. Rivel was not interested in anybody until a young man, Velvel Kuznec arrived. She was very taken with him, as he was with her. They soon decided to get engaged. Velvel (Woolf) had studied at several *yeshivot* including Slabotka and Minsk, from where he received *smicha* (ordination). Because of this, he was also known as Velve Minsker by the Lithuanian community. He was *rosh yeshiva* for a short while and was also a qualified *shochet* and *mohel*. (See Appendix III for his qualifications).

Rivel and Velvel (Woolf) were married in Krakenowo on 8 September 1933. My parents made a reception for them in their home. Friends and family joined in the celebration which included *sheva brachot* at various people's homes.



בע"ה

מז"ט ציון מז"ט

בזה אנו מתכבדים להזמין את כבודו וב"ב להשתתף בשמחת כלולת בתנו

הרב מר **זאב** את מרת **חיה רבקה** יחיו'

שתהי' אי"ה בשטו"מ ביום ו' י"ז לחדש אלול תרצ"ג (8.IX.1933)

בבית הורי הכלה בקרקינובה.

החופה בשעה 5 בערב.

בכבוד גמור

זאב זיוו ורעיתו

Rivel's wedding invitation

Rivel and Woolf's wedding celebration – 1933
Back row: Unknown, Unknown, Charlie, Unknown, Rodel, 3 yeshiva bochers.
Front row: Nina, yeshiva bocher, Chana Sora, Rivel, Woolf, Sholem Ze'ev, Unknown, Unknown.

PORTAL FOUR

part 1

South Africa

1922 – 1932

South Africa – The 'Goldene Medina'

My family's association with South Africa started with my father's two visits; the first in 1895 and later in 1898. His objective in both instances was to earn money to supplement the small income from the shop, which, with the increasing size of the family, had become insufficient. As a result of his experiences in South Africa, he felt that ultimately the entire family should move there.

An opportunity to put this plan into action came in 1909. Zelig Isaac Levin and his family were planning to emigrate to South Africa. Abe was very friendly with the second son Louis and the Levin family kindly agreed for Abe to travel with them to Africa.

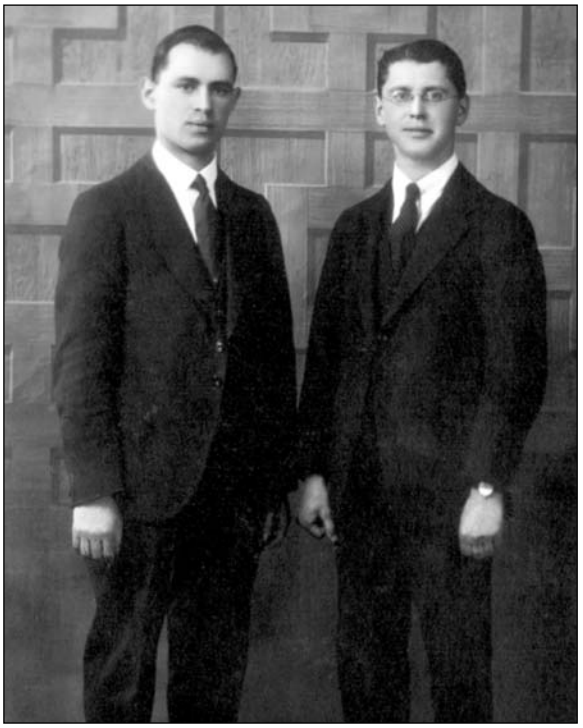
Abe was keen to embark on this adventure. He had completed his primary education in Krakenowo up to barmitzvah age and had studied for two years at the local yeshiva. He did not have any trade or higher education, but he did have determination. Abe was the eldest son and understood that his father could no longer travel to and fro. It was up to him to lead the way for the others.

Many families had already left Lithuania for a variety of reasons, poverty and fear of serving in the Czar's army in particular. My father's younger brother Louis and his wife Freidel were among them. They had gone to South Africa in about 1895 and lived in Bellevue, Johannesburg.

Naturally, Abe went to see his uncle. Louis offered him accommodation and a job in his grocery shop. Abe worked there for a few years. By the time he was twenty-one he felt he had learned enough to go out on his own.

He bought a retail drapery shop and ran it using the skills he had learned in the grocery shop, keeping meticulous control of the finances.

Harry joins Abe in South Africa



Abe and Harry – Taken in Johannesburg soon after Harry's arrival

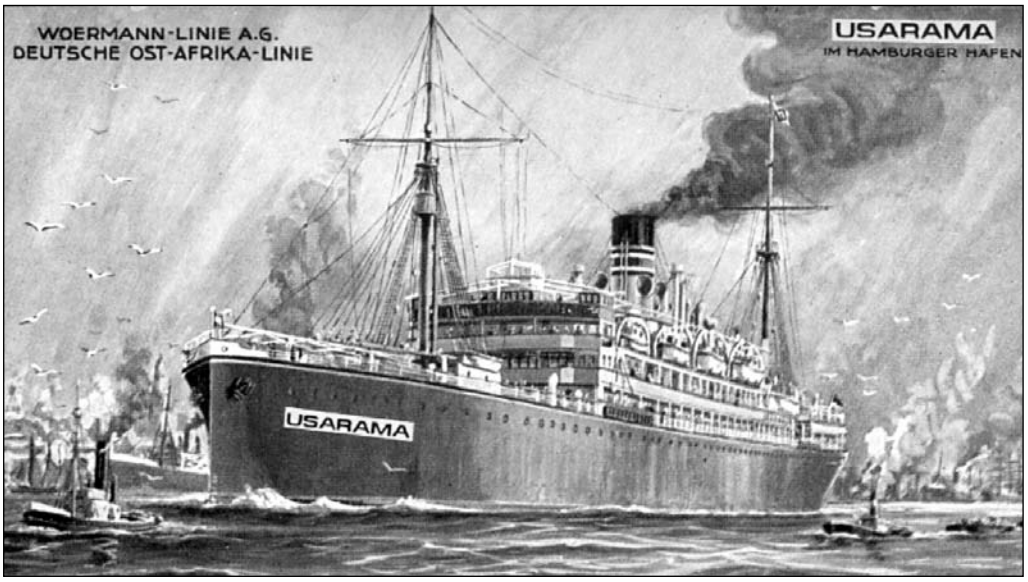
Harry helped our parents rebuild the family home and shop and, when everyone was more settled in 1922, it was decided that Harry should join Abe in South Africa. Abe by this stage was doing reasonably well in the drapery shop and was able to send Harry money for a steerage ticket.

Harry was twenty four when he left Krakenowo. He travelled in a German ship and became friendly with numerous people who also settled in Johannesburg. He retained many of these people as lifelong friends.

Abe met Harry at the station and took him back to his house. Once rested, Abe took Harry to see his drapery business, "Well Wear Drapers", at 49 Harrison Street. Harry worked for Uncle Louis for a while and then joined Abe in his business. Harry made good progress and was a great asset to his brother.

My two elder brothers were brave and courageous men. They were happy to meet the challenges life brought their way. They overcame all obstacles and made successes of their lives. They arrived with very little in a new and foreign country and yet they succeeded through sheer hard work and willpower. Harry continued to improve the drapery business in central Johannesburg and did extremely well.

My arrival in South Africa



The German vessel – 'Usarama'

On board the 'Usarama'

I managed to get a passage on the "Usarama" which was a ship of the German-South African shipping lines. Many Lithuanian Jewish emigrants sailed in Union Castle liners, a British-owned company. The story behind this is interesting. The Union Castle Line had a contract to bring Yorkshire coal miners to the goldfields of South Africa. For some obscure reason, this deal fell through. The Kovno agents got to hear of this and decided to make a "financial killing" by booking cheap passages for Litvaks who could not afford the more expensive German shipping line.

The "Usarama" sailed from the port of Hamburg on 11 July 1926. Unlike the small Union Castle ships, our German one was luxurious. There were scores of young people on board. Most of them were happy to be there. This was in sharp contrast to the middle-aged men and women who were being uprooted from their culture and traditional way of life.

WOLTERS & Co.
Abtlg. Reisebüro
Kowno Laisves al. 57
Tel. 272. Tel. Cousertlow

Aerztliche Bescheinigung.

Ich bescheinige hiermit, dass Ziwa Zundel

nicht an Favus, Trachom, Geschlechts-

oder sonstigen ansteckenden Krankheiten leidet und keine Läuse hat

sowie heute gegen Pocken geimpft wurde

Kowno, den 25 Mai 1926

(Unterschriftdes Arztes)

Form 3. 2000. 4. 28.

Medical clearance.

Švedų Amerikos Linija
Skyr. VOKIEČIŲ AFRIKOS LINIJA
VOLTERS ir Ko
KAUNAS, Laisvės Aléja 57.

Kvito Nr. 31

Gauta nuo Zundel Ziv

Vorpassage: Kowno - Hamburg

Lit. Auslandspass

Kaunas, 1926 m. 7 mėn 19 d.

ppa. Wolters & Co.

Receipt of passage ticket.

I soon struck up friendships with some of the young people who thought of themselves as "modern". They regarded those of us who were religious as old fashioned. I was one of the few youngsters on the ship who put on *tefillin* and *davened* from a *siddur.* I also would not eat any of the food that was generously served from the galley as I thought it was not kosher. My mother had given me a supply of food consisting of dried *challah*, *sucharas* (bread slices) as well as polony and smoked meat loaves which stayed fresh for weeks on end. I was very lucky to get permission to keep my food cool in the ship's refrigeration area which made a big difference to the taste. Many of the older folk on board also kept kosher and we shared such delicacies as cake, biscuits and even chocolate. The only problem I had with food was the fact that my cabin was located near the ships galley and the strong cooking smells often spoilt my appetite. I found the strong German coffee brew particularly nauseating.

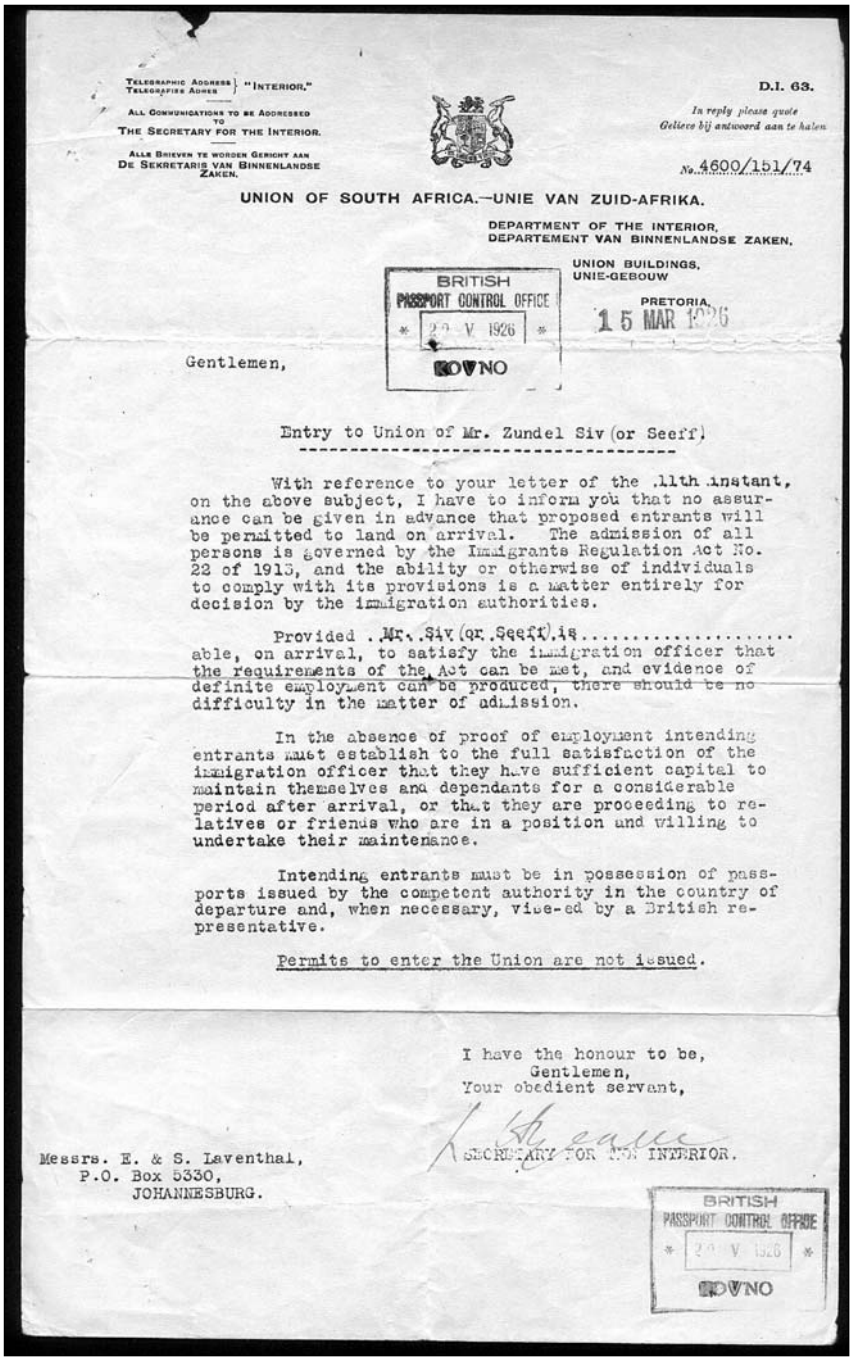
On deck of the 'Usarama'.

A highlight of the voyage was our arrival at Las Palmas. This was one of the stops between Germany and Cape Town. I vividly recall the local native youngsters who were remarkable divers. They climbed skilfully up to the stern

of the ship (some even went up the masts) from where they dived to a depth of 60 to 70 feet into the clear waters of the harbour. It was in Las Palmas that I bought my first banana, a tropical fruit almost unknown in Lithuania. Before I ate it, however, I had to find out two things: what blessing or *brocha* was needed and secondly how to actually eat the fruit! The first problem was solved by an elderly Jew, who, from his beard and yarmulke appeared to be a *talmid chacham*. He told me that in our tradition, it was not considered a fruit but a vegetable as it did not grow from a proper tree. I therefore said *borei pri ha'adamah*. As to how to eat it, I must confess that I was so hungry that for the first and last time in my life, I washed the banana carefully and ate both the peel and the fruit!

A few days later we reached South West Africa and docked at Luderitz and then at Walvis Bay. I realised then that I was nearing our final destination... Cape Town.

Entertainment on board the 'Usarama'.



TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS / TELEGRAFIES ADRES } "INTERIOR."

ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY FOR THE INTERIOR.

ALLE BRIEVEN TE WORDEN GERICHT AAN DE SEKRETARIS VAN BINNENLANDSE ZAKEN.

D.I. 63.

In reply please quote
Gelieve bij antwoord aan te halen

No. 4600/151/74

UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA.—UNIE VAN ZUID-AFRIKA.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
DEPARTEMENT VAN BINNENLANDSE ZAKEN,

UNION BUILDINGS,
UNIE-GEBOUW

PRETORIA,

15 MAR 1926

BRITISH PASSPORT CONTROL OFFICE
* 20 V 1926 *
DURNO

Gentlemen,

Entry to Union of Mr. Zundel Siv (or Seeff).

With reference to your letter of the 11th instant, on the above subject, I have to inform you that no assurance can be given in advance that proposed entrants will be permitted to land on arrival. The admission of all persons is governed by the Immigrants Regulation Act No. 22 of 1913, and the ability or otherwise of individuals to comply with its provisions is a matter entirely for decision by the immigration authorities.

Provided Mr. Siv (or Seeff) is ..... able, on arrival, to satisfy the immigration officer that the requirements of the Act can be met, and evidence of definite employment can be produced, there should be no difficulty in the matter of admission.

In the absence of proof of employment intending entrants must establish to the full satisfaction of the immigration officer that they have sufficient capital to maintain themselves and dependants for a considerable period after arrival, or that they are proceeding to relatives or friends who are in a position and willing to undertake their maintenance.

Intending entrants must be in possession of passports issued by the competent authority in the country of departure and, when necessary, vise-ed by a British representative.

Permits to enter the Union are not issued.

I have the honour to be,
Gentlemen,
Your obedient servant,

SECRETARY FOR THE INTERIOR.

Messrs. E. & S. Laventhal,
P.O. Box 5330,
JOHANNESBURG.

BRITISH PASSPORT CONTROL OFFICE
* 20 V 1926 *
DURNO

Entry permit to the Union of South Africa.

August 1926 in Cape Town

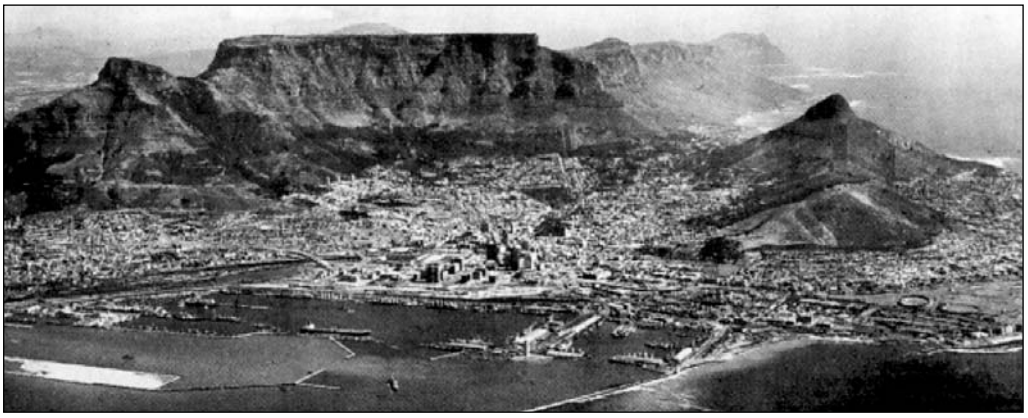


Table Mountain – Cape Town

It was strange that in all my preparatory reading for my journey to South Africa, I had not come across very much about the Mother City of Cape Town. I had read about the diamonds in Kimberley and the gold mines of Johannesburg, but I was not mentally prepared for the breathtaking views of the Cape Peninsula. Table Mountain was particularly awesome and inspiring. The famous "tablecloth" was in place that day and it became a vision that I have not been able to get out of my mind. For years afterwards I saw it again and again in my dreams and enjoyed the view of Table Mountain each time I visited Cape Town with my family in later years.

Amid the hustle and bustle of disembarkation I felt lost, lonely and even desperate. Most of the people I had befriended on board were met by someone. Little by little they went down the gangplank and disappeared with family or friends. It took at least an hour before I disembarked. As I came down the gangplank I saw someone waving cheerfully in my direction from the crowd. I did not recognise the person at all. Somehow young Tony Friedman knew who I was. I descended towards him as he called out my name. I had a friend!

Tony took me to the customs officer and made me sign a document I could not read, let alone understand. Every immigrant had to produce five pounds to

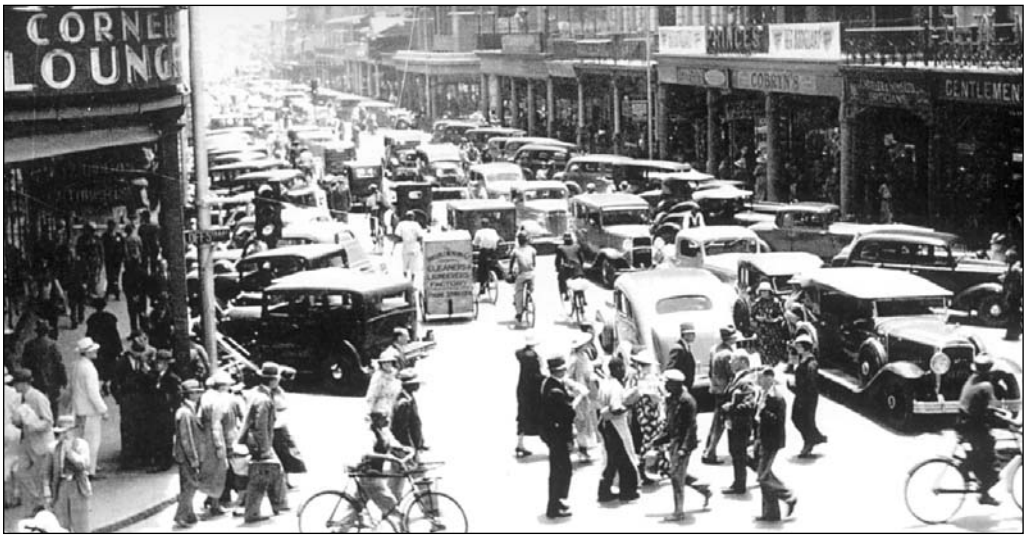
ensure he or she was not a burden to the State. Tony paid the necessary five pounds which was a lot of money in those days. At that point I wanted to try out my newly acquired English on the customs official, but he was far too busy to worry about an immigrant like me and merely said "next...next" in his effort to complete the business of the day.

Tony's father, Boruch (Barney), was a cousin to Cherne Stein. He had been in South Africa a number of years and was no longer a *greener.* Tony was born in Cape Town and, as a result, his Yiddish was weak.I remember him saying "*du zehst*" (you see). I wasn't sure what I had to see and didn't realise at the time it was a figure of speech. He tried to speak to me slowly in English in simple words, but I could not comprehend very much. His friendliness and charm, however, were infectious. Father and son were very good to me. They paid in advance for my board and lodging at a local boarding house where I spent the next few days.

Johannesburg

All too soon, my short stay in Cape Town was over and I boarded the train for the Transvaal. The journey was very slow and took about 30 hours. When the train pulled into the Germiston Station, my father's cousin Zalman Stein, Cherne's husband, and his son Shaia were there to meet me. An hour later I arrived in Johannesburg where my two brothers, Abe and Harry, were waiting. Their love for me was evident in the wonderful way in which I was welcomed. I knew Harry from *der heim* but Abe had left before I was born. It was very strange to meet a brother I only knew through letters.

Abe, by that stage, had married Gertie (Gertrude) Goldberg and they were living with Gertie's parents in their home in Doornfontein. On arrival in Johannesburg I was taken to the Goldberg's house. I remember very clearly my first impression of this house. It was fully lit and there was a most impressively laid table for eight guests in the dining room, set with beautiful plates, silver



Johannesburg 1920

cutlery and white serviettes. Abe introduced me to his wife, his in-laws, Mr and Mrs Goldberg, and Gertie's sister and brother-in-law Sarah and Harry Zinn. I also met a black man for the first time. His name was George and he worked in the Goldberg home. The meal that was served consisted of very different food from what I was used to but I managed to eat it all. Gertie advised me on table manners as well as different cultural elements in this "new world". She also explained that it would be more helpful to me to Anglicise my name from Zundel to Sydney and, from that moment on, I have only been known by the latter name.

After the meal Gertie took me to a large bedroom and handed me my first pair of South African pajamas. She also presented me with a tube of "Kolynos" toothpaste and a new toothbrush. She was a wonderful hostess. I was exhausted from all my travels and quickly fell asleep.

Since I was only seventeen, Abe and Gertie thought I would benefit from a few months in the South African school system. This would allow me to become more integrated into the country and improve my English. So early the following morning after breakfast, Abe took me to the Jewish Government School where I was enrolled and joined the standard four class, which was basically the level of my English ability.

Jewish government school

Jewish government school

I was very excited to learn that my first school in South Africa would be a Jewish one! It was called Jewish Government School. "That's a bit of good luck," I thought.

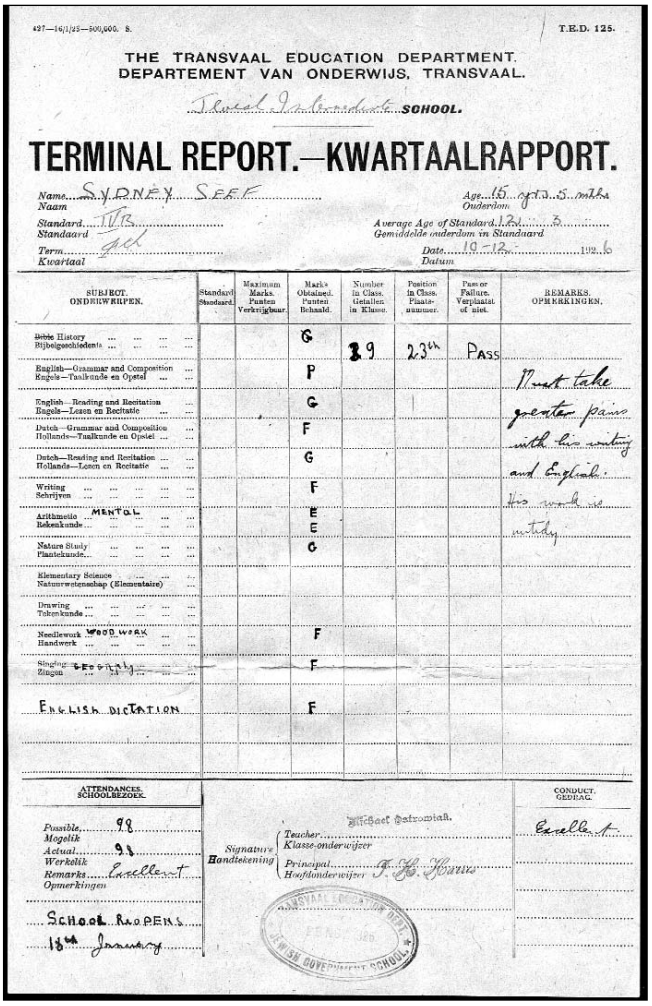
I was not disappointed. It was an exceptional school as it had a Jewish headmaster and the vast majority of pupils were Jewish. The school was unique among other government schools in that it was closed on Jewish festivals. This was because Paul Kruger, while President of the Boer Republic, granted the Jewish community land for a synagogue as well as for a school administered by Jews and

My class at the Jewish Government School. I am in the middle, wearing the blazer.

for Jews. During the course of time, innumerable non-Jewish students were enrolled. The school, however, retained its Jewish character for a long time and when I attended, I do not recall a single non-Jewish pupil. Even more curious was the fact that the first headmaster, Mr Abrahams, was also the president of the Zionist Federation at that time.

When I came to the school in 1926, Mr Harris was the principal and Mr Ostrowiak was my teacher. The latter had a serious eye defect and was give the nickname "Cockeye Mick". I do not remember much about my tuition at this school, except that I was ahead of the class in arithmetic. We immigrants were called "Russians" by the South African-born students. The impression they had was that all Russians were good at arithmetic. The truth was that I had studied this subject in Keidan and was quite brilliant at it. It must also not be forgotten that I was already seventeen at the time, while the average age of the pupils was only eleven or twelve.

My very first hour in standard four was actually very embarrassing, and it is a memory I shall not forget. My experience was that some sort of prayer was held at the start of a school day. We had done this in both Krakenowo as well as Keidan. I thus took it for granted that some prayer would be the tradition at



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THE TRANSVAAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT.
DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWIJS, TRANSVAAL.

Jewish Orphanage SCHOOL.

TERMINAL REPORT.—KWARTAALRAPPORT.

Name / Naam: SYDNEY SEEF — Age / Onderdom: 15 yrs 5 mths
Standard / Standaard: IVB — Average Age of Standard / Gemiddelde onderdom in Standaard: 12½ 5
Term / Kwartaal: 4th — Date / Datum: 10-12- 1926

SUBJECT. ONDERWERPEN.	Standard Standaard.	Maximum Marks. Punten Verkrijgbaar.	Marks Obtained. Punten Behaald.	Number in Class. Getallen in Klasse.	Position in Class. Plaatsnummer.	Pass or Failure. Verplaatst of niet.	REMARKS. OPMERKINGEN.
~~Bible~~ History / Bijbelgeschiedenis			G	39	23rd	PASS	
English—Grammar and Composition / Engels—Taalkunde en Opstel			P				Must take greater pains with his writing and English.
English—Reading and Recitation / Engels—Lezen en Recitatie			G				
Dutch—Grammar and Composition / Hollands—Taalkunde en Opstel			F				
Dutch—Reading and Recitation / Hollands—Lezen en Recitatie			G				
Writing / Schrijven			F				His work is untidy
Arithmetic MENTAL / Rekenkunde			E				
			E				
Nature Study / Plantenkunde			G				
Elementary Science / Natuurwetenschap (Elementaire)							
Drawing / Tekenkunde							
Needlework WOOD WORK / Handwerk			F				
Singing / Zingen			F				
ENGLISH DICTATION			F				

ATTENDANCES. SCHOOLBEZOEK.
Possible / Mogelik: 98
Actual / Werkelik: 93
Remarks / Opmerkingen: Excellent

Signature / Handtekening: Michael Ostrowiak, Teacher / Klasse-onderwijzer; G. H. Harris, Principal / Hoofdonderwijzer

CONDUCT. GEDRAG: Excellent

SCHOOL RE-OPENS 18th January

Report card.

this school as well. What I did not know on that first day was that all the senior pupils went to the school hall before classes for assembly and prayers. By the time I arrived in the classroom, I found all the pupils standing and reciting, what to me sounded like a prayer. It was a mistake any foreigner who was struggling with the English language could make. They were all standing straight and silent in four rows, with the teacher standing at the front. Many of them had their eyes closed to concentrate better. It seemed to me that something very solemn was about to happen. Then I heard the teacher say: "Boys...altogether now...rapidly and clearly... Five fives are twenty-five, six fives are thirty, seven fives are thirty-five, eight fives are forty, nine fives are forty-five, ten fives are fifty, eleven fives are fifty-five, twelve fives are sixty." The lines were recited softly and solemnly. I could not, for the life of me, make out the individual words. All I heard was a rapid chant of some sort – a prayer possibly. I bowed my head in pious humility and tried to mumble these English words which seemed to me to be a prayer being offered up to the Almighty. Only later that day did I discover how foolish I was. They were, of course, reciting their five times multiplication table!

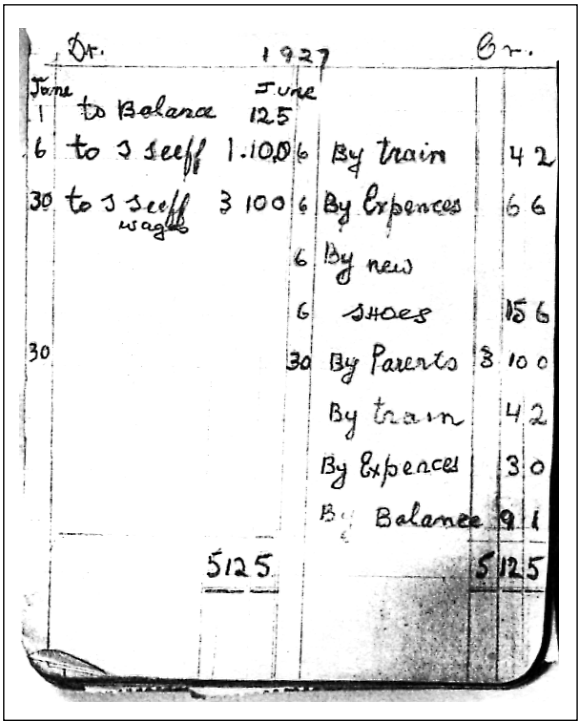
Modder East

The year 1926 ended with my leaving the Jewish Government School. I could, by this time, understand the English language. During the summer holidays I looked for a job to earn some money. I finally found work with a Mr Levy on the mine at Modder East and I started working on 21 February 1927. Modder East is the railway station before Benoni. In those days Modder East was one of the richer gold mines on the Witwatersrand (Ridge of White Waters) which was the largest gold reef in the world at that time. The ridge extended from Randfontein in the west to Springs in the east, a distance of some 100 km. It included the towns of Randfontein, Krugersdorp, Germiston, Benoni, Springs and Nigel. When I arrived in South Africa each one of these towns had a Jewish community with a *shul*, officials, and afternoon Hebrew schools to teach the children who went to the local secular schools. These towns generally had a thriving communal life. I longed to be part of one of these communities, but fortune did not favour this desire.

The mine near Modder East was large. My employer had been an under-

Map of various country towns where I worked.

ground engineer and a mine captain, who had accumulated a fair amount of money and opened a concession store-cum-eating house for the black mine workers. In addition to the black miners, he also had white customers who would come to his store. Initially my job was not a very pleasant one, but as I learned "Fanagalo", the contrived universal black language, I became relaxed and enjoyed the job more. Serving and working behind a counter was not my idea of a noble career. The wage I was paid, however, was considered to be good, about ten pounds for three months plus board and lodging!



Dr. 1927 Cr.

June			June				
1	to Balance		1	25			
6	to J Seeff	1.10.0	6	By train		4	2
30	to J Seeff wages	3 10 0	6	By Expences		6	6
			6	By new			
			6	shoes		15	6
30			30	By Parents	3	10	0
				By train		4	2
				By Expences		3	0
				By Balance		9	1
		5125				5125	

Journal showing amounts sent home – 1927

In this way I managed to save some money. Saving was very important to me as I wanted to help my family in Krakenowo. From every wage packet I sent one pound and ten shillings (and sometimes more) to my parents in Lithuania each month.

Mr Levy was a stern man and treated his employees in a strict but fair manner. His wife, on the other hand, was a lady and their three sons were quite well-disposed towards me. Mrs Levy even had a wireless set! This was the first time I had seen one. It was on her radio that we heard about Charles Lindbergh's first straight flight across the Atlantic, from New York to Paris on his famous flying machine "The Spirit of St Louis". He covered the distance of 3 605 miles in just over 33 hours on 21 May 1927.

On 22 August, a mere six months after I started working for Mr Levy, I was considered to be experienced enough to be moved from the eating house to selling goods in the general store. This was a more responsible job and carried with it a larger salary.

What made me happy about this job, was that I was able to take a train back to Johannesburg every second weekend. The journey took forty minutes and the train was comfortable. I loved Johannesburg and the Jewish community there. The place was rapidly maturing from a miner's camp into one of the world's large cities, and the Jewish community was developing with it. I had *landsleit* as well as many friends in Johannesburg, not to mention my two dear brothers, Abe and Harry, who took turns to entertain and "guide" me. In a very short space of time, I changed from being a *greener* to more of a city slicker. After eighteen months, I was able to leave Mr Levy and the nervous stomach he gave me, and move onto the next adventure which life had in store for me.

Life in the Western Transvaal

My next job took me to Bodenstein near Lichtenberg in the Western Transvaal where I began working on 2 October 1928. My boss was Mr Alswang, a genial Litvak who had a large store which catered mainly for the needs of the neighbouring farmers. I did not know it at the time but we were to become *ferd-fuss-potzkeva*, which is a Yiddish expression which needs some

explanation. His wife's maiden name was Gordon. I befriended a co-worker, Morris Bourgstein, who helped me a great deal. He later married Lily Said who lived in Pretoria. She was a niece of Mrs Alswang. Years later I married another of Mrs Alswang's nieces, Naomi Gordon. When we got married in 1945 I became "distantly related" to Alswang's family, which is what the strange expression means. Literally it means; *ferd* (horse), *fuss* (leg), *potzkeva* (horse-shoe) – we were connected only through the horse's shoe and were not really attached to one another directly.

Mr Alswang's family as children.
From left: Emily, Mickey, Rochie, Sylvia, Sydney.

Mr Alswang's general store was, in my terms, a definite promotion and every day was very *lebbedik* (lively). The store reminded me of my parents shop in Krakenowo as they both sold a similar range of goods. The customers were a mix of both English and Afrikaans-speaking people. A farmer could buy all he needed for his farm at this country store. Items such as groceries, clothing, hardware, as well as ploughs and other instruments, were all obtainable. The black population in the area came to buy mielies and mielie-meal, which was their basic staple food. Mr Alswang did well from all sectors of the community. It was here that I began speaking Afrikaans and became relatively fluent in the language.

The Alswang family in Bodenstein a few years later.
From left: Emily, Mickey, Rochie, Sylvia, Mendel Alswang, his wife Leah, Sydney.

I had an interesting social life at this time, even if I say so myself, I look rather dashing in these photographs! Mr Alswang had some horses on his property and it was there that I learned to ride.

The Northern Transvaal

The first motor car which I drove – Messina 1929

Just under a year later, I decided to spread my wings and move to the Northern Transvaal. I became a very good salesman for Harry Silverman in the town of Messina, which was the border town with Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). I started working in this area on 28 August 1929. By that stage I was earning eighteen pounds per month. The Silverman family owned half of the town, or so it seemed to me. The family were a very pleasant lot and enjoyed good food and drink. My boss's younger brother Meyer Silverman was a real *fresser* (eater). To see him eat a whole turkey, as well as down a bottle of whisky, was an unforgettable sight.

I mentioned earlier that the first time I saw a motor car was in Krakenowo when I was 13 years old. It was in Messina, however, that I took my first ride in a car, at a terrifying speed of 25 miles an hour! I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. In general, however, life in Messina was unpleasant. Air-conditioning still had to be invented and the heat in the area, especially in summer, was unbearable, sometimes climbing as high as 115 degrees Fahrenheit. Then there was the problem of snakes and scorpions! Deadly black mambas were not only a common sight, but were also frequent companions in our sleeping quarters which were behind the store. After five months I decided to move away from this northern *gehinnom* (hell). The area may have been renowned for its rich copper mines, but it was a difficult place in which to live. The town's only redeeming feature, in my opinion, was the open-air cinema and my friends and I would often go to see a show at night.

I left the Silverman employ on 22 January, 1930 and decided to look further south for a job. I moved back into my brother Abe's home while I decided where I was going next.

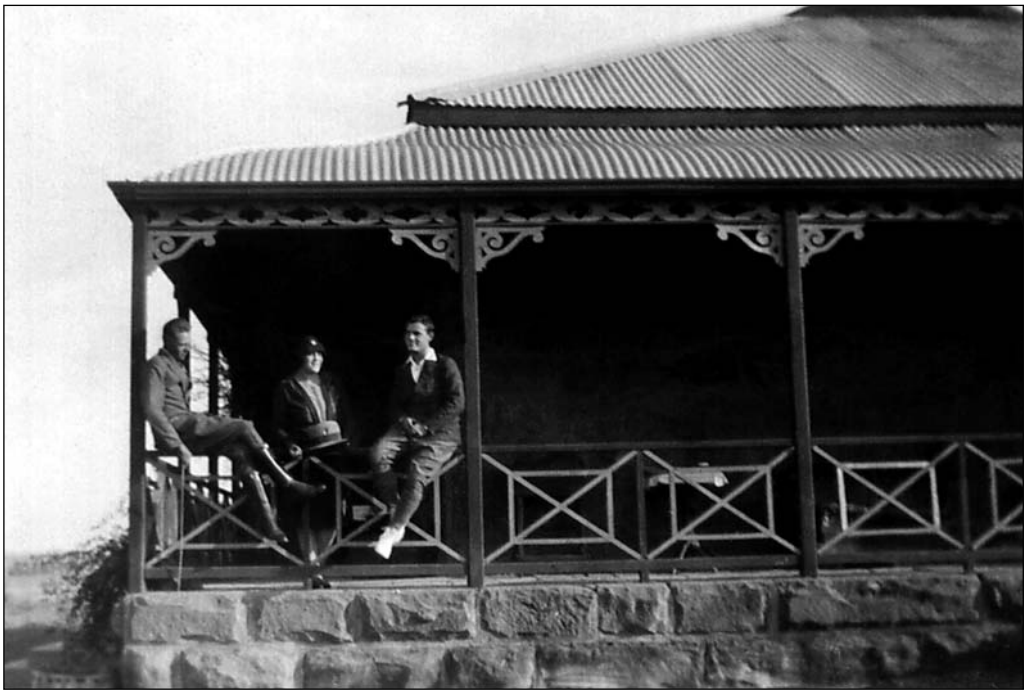
Farming in the Orange Free State

By February I had organised a new job, this time in the Orange Free State on a large farm Naauwport, 20 miles from Tweespruit. The farm was about 10 000 morgen and was owned by the Masisi family. My boss David Sacks had a trading store on the Naauwport farm and I began working in the shop on 25 February 1930. The neighbouring farmers were mainly English, as much land in the area had been given to English servicemen who had fought in the Boer War and did not want to return to England. There were a few Afrikaaner farmers but, by and large, the customers who frequented the shop were English speaking. Most of the farmers in the area went in for dairy farming and sent their milk to the nearby town, Tweespruit, which had large dairies producing butter, cheese and cream. The products were then sent to the larger towns in special cold storage containers.

In December 1931 I gave notice to David Sacks, who wanted to retire, and entered into a partnership with his sister Mrs Shavinsky in January 1932. We bought the trading store from David Sacks and also ran a successful dairy farm. We built up a herd of 25 Friesland cows as well as oxen which were used for ploughing. Sheep rearing was also lucrative and we sold the wool through Port Elizabeth shippers for export to England.

My brothers Abe, Harry and Morris would often come out to visit me when I lived on the farm. We all loved being out in the open air and enjoyed galloping on the horses. My cousin Sam Seeff and his new bride Tilly also came to visit a number of times.

I became very friendly with some of the local farmers in the area. One family in particular made a very big impression upon me. Their surname was Venter and they were "Dopers" which meant they were vegetarian and did not believe in doctors, preferring to treat illnesses with age-old herbal remedies. I was fascinated with their vegetarian eating habits as well as their general health regime and have absorbed some of their ideas. I also remember their "cold box". This was in the days before electric refrigerators and freezers. Ice boxes were the

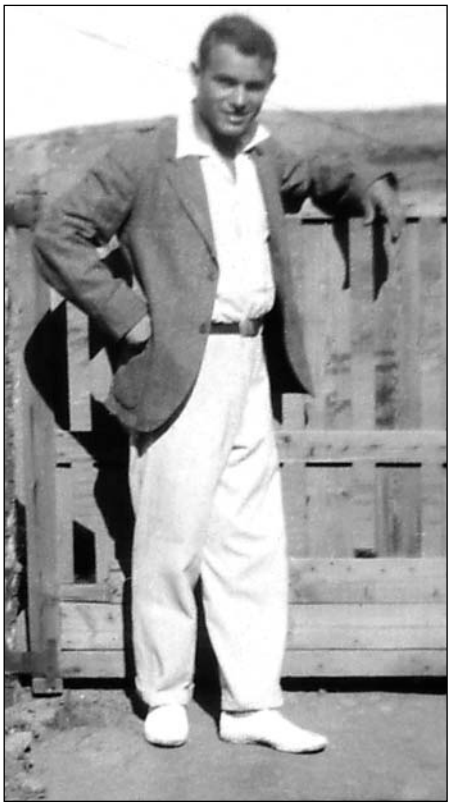


The Venter family home

usual method used to keep food, especially dairy products, fresh. The Venters built their own cool box. The outer frame was made out of timber forming a box approximately a metre by a metre. A double layer of chicken mesh was wrapped around three sides of this frame. Between the layers of mesh were pieces of coke. A sheet of metal formed the top section. Along each timber support of this top was a gully which held water. There were tiny holes in these gullies to allow water to slowly drip down between the mesh and over the coke. The front door was on a hinge and was also covered with doubled mesh. Inside there were shelves. The box was kept cool by means of the wind which cooled down the coke and water and thus maintained a low temperature for food stored on the shelves.

The local African tribe in the area was the Barolong, who for many years had been at peace with the Afrikaners. Thaba'Nchu was at one time the chief town of the Baralongs, under Chief Moroka. In 1880, his son led a rebellion against the Afrikaners which they easily crushed. The outcome of this clash, however, resulted in the two racial groups living peacefully together from then onwards.

I had many Barolongs working for me and, although I found them to be a bit lazy, we always got along.



During my farming days.

Had the conditions been less cruel, I would have made enough money to assist in bringing my family, who were still living in the *shtetl,* safely to South Africa. A number of factors combined to foil my plans. The Great Drought of 1931 was the worst in living memory. By 1931 the Great Depression had also reached our part of the planet. The Gold Standard crisis in the following year made the situation even worse. International money up until that time was based on the Gold Standard which meant that all money held by a country had to be backed by gold. After the crisis, a country was able to print money without the gold reserves. To further compound our difficulties, a plague of locusts descended on the countryside so that, after two days, not a blade of grass, nor a leaf on a tree, remained. At night one could see heaps of fully-gorged locusts almost half a metre high.

Mrs Shavinsky and I decided to dissolve our partnership and I paid her out her share of the venture. She continued working at her own store about twelve kilometres from Tweespruit. With no alternative available to me because of the incredible drought conditions, I sent my milking cows and cattle to Potchefstroom with some of the farm labourers, as that region had had some rain. The trip of some 450 kilometres left the cattle starved and lean. Worse was yet to come. The grass in Tweespruit had been *soetgras*, alkaline and sweet. The grass in Potchefstroom, on the other hand, was *suurgras*, very sour and acidic.

By the time the drought was over and the rains had come, only 30 percent of my herd remained. It was time to move again. It is possible that, had I persisted, I could have been a successful farmer. Some of my heifers recovered after a prolonged period of special nourishment made up of green rye that grew after the rains fell. The remaining oxen also recovered. Nevertheless my mind was made

On my trusty steed – Blackie.

up, as I had seen the writing on the wall.

Of course I was left with many regrets. One of them was my daily gallop on my horse Blackie. He was not only a wonderful horse, but a constant companion and a real friend. I had become really attached to him. He was my favourite, and I was his. We were like the Biblical David and Jonathan: "Beloved and pleasant in life and in death not to be parted". Anyone else who dared ride him was in for a vicious performance of bucking, kicking, snorting and biting. Alas! All good things must come to an end and I moved back to Johannesburg.

Family commitments

Despite all my difficulties while working in different places around the country I never neglected my Krakenowo family. I wrote at least one letter a week. I also sent a portion of my salary and earnings to them regularly, usually more than I could afford. I remember on one occasion my parents indicated that

they were having financial difficulties with my sister Nina's schooling in Ponevez. Times were not good for me, nevertheless I sent money for her to complete her high school education at Yavneh.

Through our regular correspondence, I was kept abreast of what was happening back in Krakenowo. I well remember the letters concerning my sister Rivel and my parents' concern for a suitable marriage partner. In due course, she met and became engaged to Velvel (Woolf) Kuznec.

At the time of Rivel's marriage, in 1933, Abe, Harry, Morris and I were already living in South Africa. Travel was very expensive and none of us was able to attend the wedding. The remaining family in Krakenowo had a photograph taken which they sent to us as well as the "official" wedding celebration photograph. They also sent us a family photograph taken soon after the wedding.

Family photo taken in Krakenowo in 1933. BACK ROW (from left): Tainke Kotzen, a yeshiva bocher, Nina, Fivele's daughter, Fivele's wife, Pessa Chaia's husband, Pessa Chaia (Ben-Zion's daughter), Ben-Zion. FRONT ROW: Chaia Zelda Kruger, Chana Sora, Sholem Ze'ev, Chaia Rivka, Woolf, Rodel, Charlie.

My return to Johannesburg

It took a while to sort out my financial affairs on the farm. I had to dissolve my partnership with Mrs Shavinsky as well as pay all my debts. During this time I often travelled to and from Johannesburg. My brother Morris had arrived from Krakenowo by this time and I wanted to spend time with my family. I finally concluded the necessary transactions on the farm and returned permanently to Johannesburg in 1932.

Even though I had lost a lot of money as a result of the drought period, I still had about one hundred pounds saved. I came back to live with Abe and Gertie and began to make a new life for myself in the big city. One of the first things I did was go to *shul* regularly.

The Jewish community in Johannesburg

After the period of the Anglo-Boer War the activities in the Jewish community in Johannesburg reflected the origins of two distinct groups. The English Jews had arrived earlier and had established *shuls* as well as other facilities. In the earlier part of the century Litvak Jews began arriving, bringing with them different styles and trends. There was remarkably little friction between the two groups. This allowed the Jewish community to develop along relatively homogeneous lines.

At the beginning of the century there were very big changes in the demographics of the Jewish community in South Africa. In 1911, the census figures

show that there were 46 926 Jews living in the country. By 1926 the figure had grown to 72 169. During this time substantial numbers lived in the smaller centres and in the countryside. The peak period for Jews living in the *platteland* (countryside) was during the 1920s, after which there was a gradual movement to the larger towns, especially Johannesburg. When I first arrived in Johannesburg there were about seventeen different congregations. There were two distinct areas where Jews tended to live. The one was the western suburbs of Johannesburg, namely Fordsburg and Brixton. The other was the eastern suburbs of Doornfontein, Bertrams, Yeoville and Hillbrow to the north. There were wealthier Jews living further afield in Parktown, Houghton and beyond, areas which attracted Jews some years later.

The Lion's Shul – Doornfontein.

I followed my brother Abe's lead and gravitated towards Doornfontein. There were a number of *shuls* in this area, two of which were housed in very large and magnificent buildings. One was the Wolmarans Street Synagogue which was the seat of the Chief Rabbi. The first *shul* I attended on arrival in Johannesburg was the Lion's Shul in Doornfontein, named for the lion statues that stand at the entrance. By strange chance it is one of the few religious Jewish buildings that still stands in the area. Even though the neighbourhood is no longer inhabited by Jews it remains an active community, serving businessmen (on their way to and from work in the central area of Johannesburg) who are in need of an early morning or evening *minyan,* usually for the purpose of saying *Kaddish*.

Landsmanschaften

Besides becoming acquainted with those who went to *shul* regularly, I also found great solace in being with members of the Krakenowo *Landsmanschaft*. This society had been established many years before I arrived in South Africa.

The overwhelming majority of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to South Africa came from the Kovno *Gubernia.* We were often described as a "Colony of Lithuania". The next generation, those born in South Africa, retained many of the basic Lithuanian characteristics such as love of learning, generosity towards charitable causes, and a deep attachment to the Jewish traditions of the *shtetl.* When I came to Johannesburg the leadership of almost every congregation had passed into the hands of Litvaks. Even the *Eingelshe* (English) community bowed to their influence and example. The *greeners* became the body politic of the community.

From the very early days of immigration to South Africa, there was a tendency for the Yiddish-speaking men to form *landsmanschaften* which were immigrant benevolent organisations, formed and named after the members' hometowns in Eastern Europe. Most of these societies were established in the new country in the late 1890s. The purpose of each society was to provide mutual aid such as sick benefits and interest-free loans, as well as social gatherings. The *landsmanschaften* had a profound effect on the social life and progress of the Jewish community. They were meeting places for solitary men who had left their families behind in the *shtetl.* They were also instrumental in assisting men to bring out their wives, children and relatives from the hometown community as well as giving loans to those communities they had left behind in *der heim*. After the war years and the general drop in immigration, the membership of many of these societies declined and stopped functioning. However, many of them survived for decades and even celebrated their jubilees. The three largest societies in South Africa were the Kovno, Ponevez and Keidan Societies but there were many others including that of Krakenowo, which I will describe in detail later.

The societies were not only concerned with the old country but were active in supporting local charity needs as well. They supported all the *chevras,* especially the Chevrah Kadisha which was the most important, but organisations such as the Women's Benevolent Society were also assisted.

The Krakenowo Sick Benefit and Benevolent Society was established in 1901. Soon after my arrival in South Africa I became involved with my *landsmanschaft,* an activity I still continue. The Krakenowo Sick Benefit and Benevolent Society celebrated its diamond jubilee in 1961. After I got married, my wife Naomi and I participated in all the society's activities. In the last section of this autobiography, I shall return to a description of the society's work and useful endeavours.

During those early days quite a few social clubs became popular. The Jewish Guild began as an association of young Jewish men and women for the relief of economic distress, but it developed into a cultural and social group in addition to the charity aspects. The Jewish Dramatic Society presented Yiddish plays which were attended by huge crowds of Jews as well as some gentiles. These were very popular and were performed every evening, and at matinees on Sundays. In those days there were several Yiddish newspapers and numerous publications in the modern Hebrew style.

PORTAL FOUR

part 2

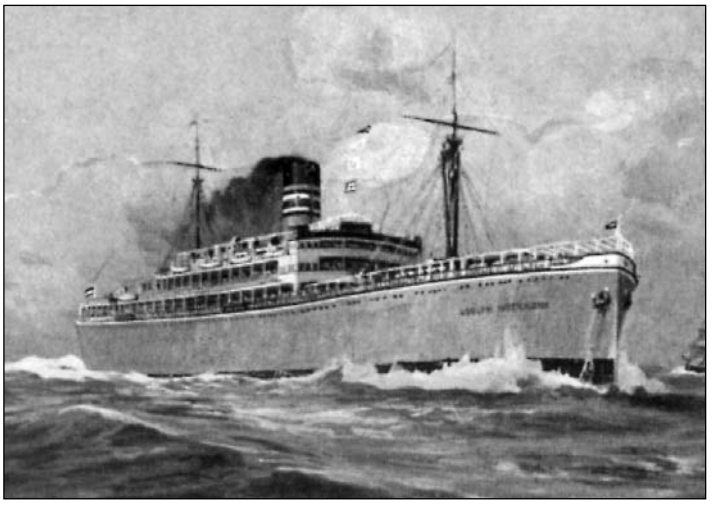
South Africa
Sydmore Engineering
1932 – present

My brother Morris

When we were all young and growing up in Krakenowo, life was very hard and there was little money for basics, never mind luxuries. As a result of this, my brother Morris, who, from his earliest days had an enquiring mind and wonderfully talented hands, decided to make his own playthings. One of his challenges was to make a chess set. Using a simple pen knife and local *brozeva* wood, Morris painstakingly cut and moulded each piece. However, he needed ink in order to dye half the pieces and this was obtained from school. On completion he discovered that he had no receptacle to hold the pieces, so he also made a little box. The game was now complete, but not to his satisfaction so he started the whole process once again and, using his past experience, made a more rounded set. That was the start of many projects in this talented man's life.

Morris in Kovno, Lithuania, 1929.

Morris, as mentioned earlier, studied in the Kovno ORT School where he obtained a diploma, specialising in tool and die-making as well as fitting and turning. He was the only one in our family who came to South Africa with any sort of qualification. When he was only fourteen years old he knew what he wanted to do with his life; he wanted to work with machinery.



The German vessel "Adolph Woermann".

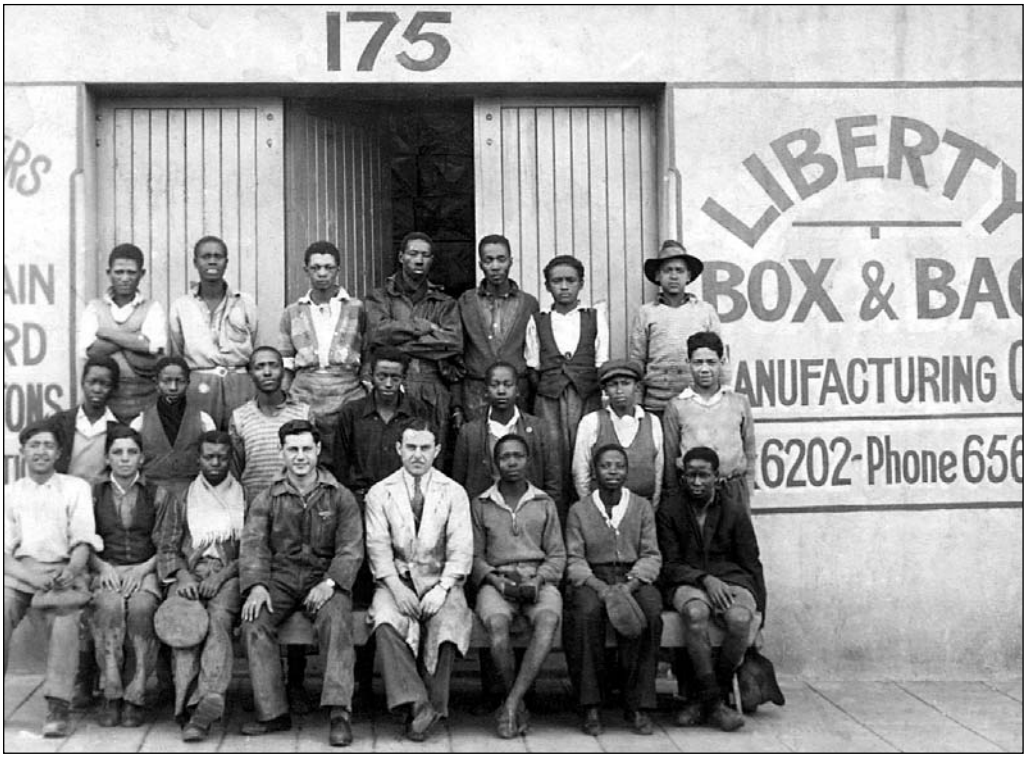
His plan was to study at the ORT School in Kovno and then to journey to South Africa to be with his brothers.

When he left Krakenowo he was completely on his own as I was when I left. He travelled by train to Kovno and then onto Hamburg in Germany. The year was 1929 and Europe and the world were in the midst of the Depression. Morris travelled on a second-class ticket on the *Adolf Woermann*. He shared a cabin with four other young men. He carried the required thirty pounds for the South African authorities to show that he would not be a burden on the state and had two pounds for spending. The ship docked in Rotterdam and then Las Palmas, Luderitz and finally Cape Town. He arrived in South Africa in September 1929 and since he could speak no English, was at a greater disadvantage than I had been when I arrived. A Jewish group met him at the harbour and took him to a boarding house. He stayed in Cape Town for two or three days during which time he met up with the Tockers who were *landsleit.* On his arrival in Johannesburg, he too stayed with my brother Abe and his wife Gertie at her parents who were now living at 22 Muller Street, Yeoville.

Due to the Depression the economic situation in South Africa was not favourable for immigrants. Morris went looking for a job in any type of engineering firm but was initially unsuccessful. Eventually, he got a job as a motor mechanic. This did not work out as he was not used to the way mechanics worked in this country. His next job was that of an ordinary artisan at SA Steel Furniture. His boss, Mr Rosenbaum was dishonest in many of his dealings, especially when it came to paying wages. Morris felt insecure in this job. Despite his inexperience and youth, Morris was not naïve and understood what kind of man Rosenbaum was. It was inevitable that the business would not

succeed, and sure enough, one morning Morris was told that the company was in liquidation and that he was out of a job.

Once again Morris walked the streets looking for employment. After a short while a lucky break came from Mr Fulton, a general manager at Ysebrand, who gave him a position. Morris's specific job was to help the engineer, Mr Aronowitz. This gentleman had tried to build an automatic paper bag machine for over a year and had not succeeded. Mr Fulton, recognising my brother's ability, asked him to complete the machine on his own. My brother was taken aback – after all, he was only eighteen years old and inexperienced, so he declined the offer. However, fate played its hand at this point and the engineer working on the job was fired. Morris was thrown into the task and, together with Mr Fulton, completed the machine. The machine worked well and was a great asset to the company. As a result of this achievement, Morris was promoted to take charge of the whole plant. Unfortunately, Ysebrand underwent a sudden change of ownership and the new owner appointed a foreman who said he was



Morris and staff at Liberty Box.

a qualified engineer from Palestine. Morris was ordered to teach the new foreman as well as take orders from him. The situation soon became untenable and my brother resigned.

While Morris worked at Ysebrand he managed to save sixty pounds. Abe encouraged him to go out on his own, while Harry said that he should find a job which would give him a fixed monthly wage. Morris decided to follow both their advice. He kept on looking for a job in accordance with Harry's view, but he also respected Abe's suggestion and bought a second-hand lathe for forty pounds. He rented a small space in the carpentry workshop of a Mr Schindler (at 99 Pritchard Street) for two pounds per month and began working for himself, by repairing machines. One of his customers was Liberty Box which offered him better premises. Morris thus started his first business as "Morris Seeff Engineering" in 1931 with a total capital of one hundred pounds: eighty pounds from his savings and twenty pounds from a loan from Abe and Harry. Morris was happy because at last he was his own boss. He then bought a second-hand motorcycle for three or four pounds, enabling him to become independent of public transportation.

Sydmore Engineering – our destiny

It is my opinion that had my brother Morris not decided to go to Kovno and study in the ORT trade school and obtain his diploma, we may never have gone into the engineering industry. When we arrived in South Africa our brothers Abe and Harry were shopkeepers. I had worked on different jobs on the Reef and in the country in the commercial field. When I was at Naauwpoort I completed a correspondence course in bookkeeping. All things pointed to a commercial future for me. Yet when Morris arrived in South Africa with his skills, I

Technical College in Eloff Street (on the right).

knew that my future was to be linked to his. *Hashem* has His own way of showing us the road ahead.

Our brother Abe was always keen for Morris and I to go into business together. At the end of 1932 I joined Morris and we established a company called Sydmore Engineering Works (Pty) Ltd. The SYD came from my name while the MORE was from Morris's name. Morris was involved with the engineering aspect of the business, while I was concerned with the administration and sales. I felt it necessary to obtain some knowledge in the engineering field and enrolled at the Johannesburg Technical College in Eloff Street, attending night school to study technical drawings and draughting. I received my ATC 2 which is equivalent to a two-year study course, after matriculation.

We rented premises at 75 Polly Street in central Johannesburg and our first jobs were to repair printing presses and fix wood-working machines. A large furniture company, Steel and Barnett, became a large customer of ours and when the workload increased, besides our first black employee, John Maluleke ("John Number One"), we also employed our first qualified fitter, Mr Rudin, who assisted Morris with the various repairs.

We begin to make fire escapes

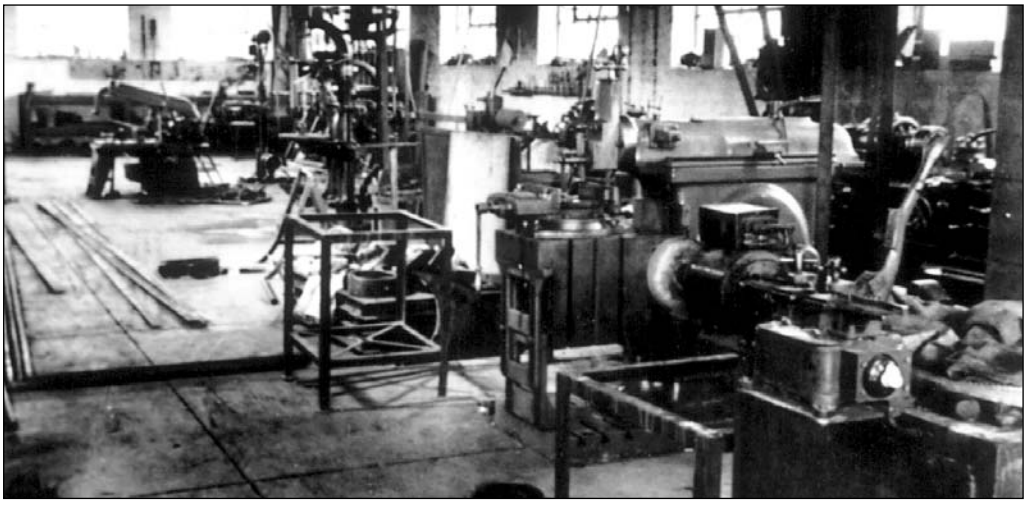
In the early stages of our fledgling business a certain Mr Trundle came for an interview. He claimed to be an expert fire escape engineer and made an excellent impression on my brother and me. We decided to use his expertise to go into our first big venture to build and erect a fire escape. What we did not know at the time was that Mr Trundle, despite his grooming and convincing manners, was a drunkard! Through him we became involved in a two hundred and seventy-five pound order for a fire escape for a seven-storey building on the corner of Harrison and Kerk Streets. Relying on the so-called expertise, we invested all our available capital into this project – allowing for the cost of material, labour and a small profit. Actually none of us had the necessary knowledge to build a fire escape. We followed Trundle's instructions and, after six weeks of hard labour, the structure was ready for erection. It took us an additional three or four weeks to assemble it and to attach it to each of the seven floors.

To our total dismay and disappointment, the municipal building inspector examined it and condemned the structure on the grounds that it was shaky and unsafe. We were devastated, as all our capital was invested in this project. Trundle at this stage did not turn up to work and we had to discharge him. We were left with the full responsibility. We were naturally most upset, but Morris wasted no time and went out to examine many other fire escapes in the city. He realised that the reason ours was shaky was that it did not have cross-stays like all the other fire escapes he had inspected. We succeeded in adjusting the condemned structure to the inspector's satisfaction and were then paid by the owners of the building.

The profit we eventually made convinced us that fire escapes were a paying proposition and Sydmore Engineering went on to become the city's fire escape specialist. With Morris's inborn talent for everything in that line, he managed to simplify and devise many different ways of constructing and affixing these building accessories. The traditional method of erecting a fire escape was to assemble the entire structure and then, with the help of ten men, attach the entire

structure to the building. Morris devised a simple method of erecting two stringers which stabilised the basic structure and then stays were inserted between the stringers. The fire escape was thus built from the ground upwards alongside the building. This method was simple, yet most effective, and allowed us to erect a ten-storey fire escape within a week using only two or three men. Within a short time we became leaders in the design, construction and erection of fire-escapes and there was no-one on the Witwatersrand who could match our structures for price and quality. Some years later, the same building inspector congratulated us on a fire escape structure which we put up at the Clarendon Cinema. When the prestigious His Majesty's Building was built, it was Sydmore Engineering that was awarded the contract for certain structural engineering work, including fabrication of the flagpole on top. This was a landmark in the Johannesburg Central Business District for many years.

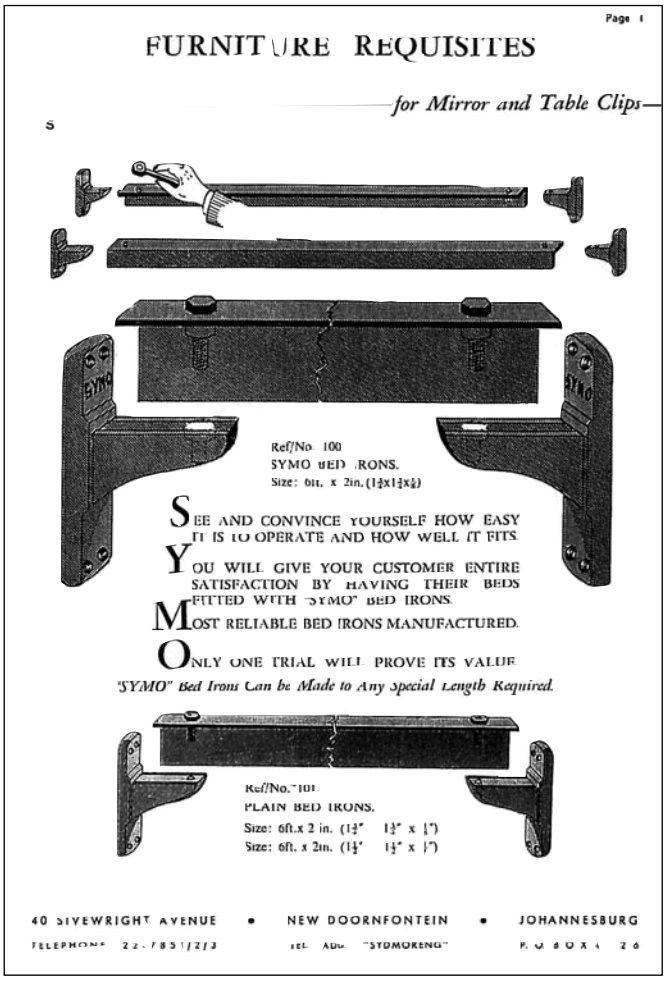
Sydmore Engineering expands



Sydmore Engineering's first factory

In addition to the fire escapes, we were also involved in manufacturing items for the furniture industry. In the early 1930's we were producing bed-irons and various types of furniture handles. Initially our bed-iron trademark was "Fittex". We then improved the bed-iron design under the name "Vorno". In 1933 we decided to register a new trademark "Symo", another abbreviation of our two names and a name we have continued to use till today.

Morris and I used to travel on his motorcycle to visit the various building sites and furniture manufacturers to sell our bed-irons. When he could not take me with him, I went alone on foot. Eventually, in 1936, we bought our first car, a Ford. It took me three weeks to learn how to drive after which time I received my driver's licence. Nobody believed I could do it in such a short time but I was determined and triumphed in the end.


Page 1

FURNITURE REQUISITES

for Mirror and Table Clips

Ref/No. 100
SYMO BED IRONS.
Size: 6ft. x 2in. (1¾x1¾x¼)

SEE AND CONVINCE YOURSELF HOW EASY IT IS TO OPERATE AND HOW WELL IT FITS.

YOU WILL GIVE YOUR CUSTOMER ENTIRE SATISFACTION BY HAVING THEIR BEDS FITTED WITH "SYMO" BED IRONS.

MOST RELIABLE BED IRONS MANUFACTURED.

ONLY ONE TRIAL WILL PROVE ITS VALUE.

"SYMO" Bed Irons Can be Made to Any Special Length Required.

Ref/No. "101"
PLAIN BED IRONS.
Size: 6ft.x 2 in. (1¾" 1¾" x ¼")
Size: 6ft. x 2in. (1¾" 1¾" x ⅛")

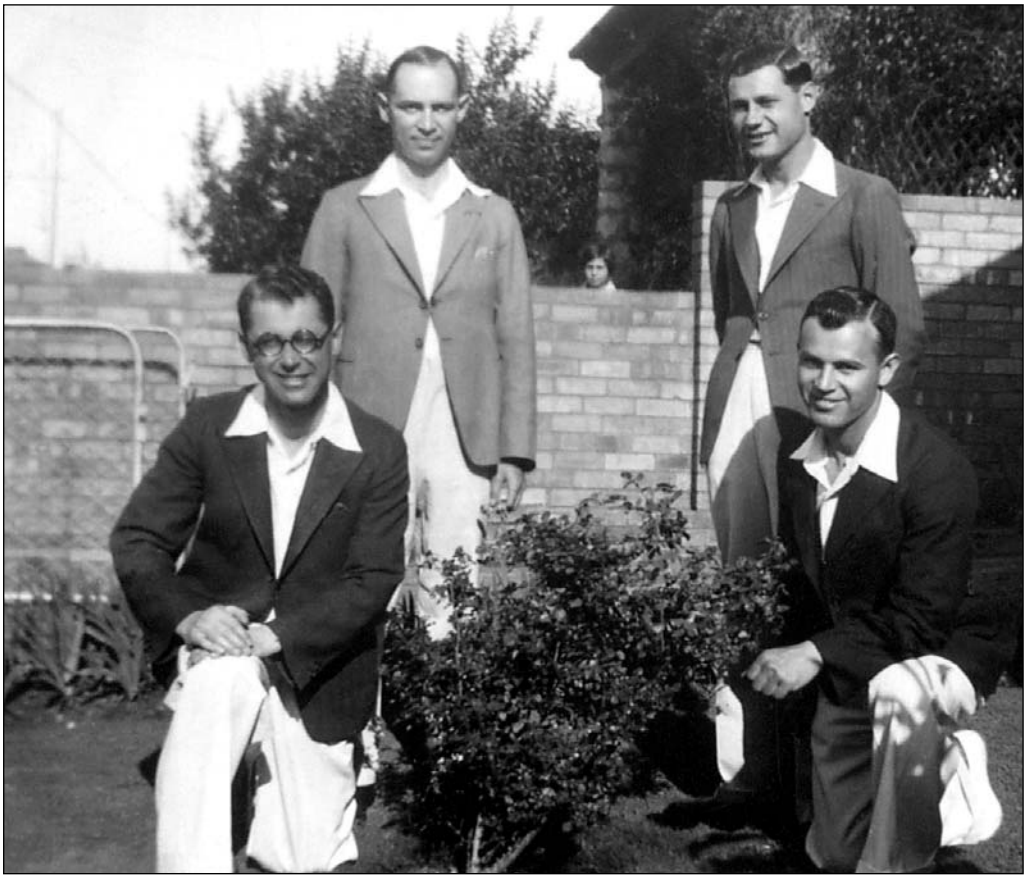
40 SIVEWRIGHT AVENUE • NEW DOORNFONTEIN • JOHANNESBURG

TELEPHONE 22-7851/2/3 TEL. ADD. "SYDMORENG" P.O. BOX 26

Furniture requisites – advertising pamphlet – 1935.

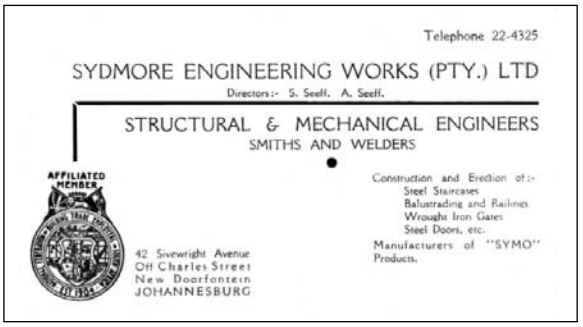
The business was growing and the premises at 75 Polly Street were not suitable for the construction of large fire escapes, so our brother Harry came to the rescue. He had bought a property at 40 Sivewright Avenue in Doornfontein. These premises suited us very well. Sivewright Avenue at that time was a cul-de-sac so we could also utilise the pavements outside to rig up the fire escapes. The Johannes-

burg Municipality did not take kindly to this occupancy and we often received five pound fines for illegal use of public property. Needless to say, we continued, as it was cheaper to pay the fines than rent premises at thirty pounds a month or buy property which would have been more expensive.



The Four Seeff brothers (from bottom left): Harry, Abe, Morris and Sydney

By the late 1930s we were involved with the building of the many skyscrapers that were being constructed in Johannesburg such as the Escom Building in Fox Street, Louis and Marks Building in President Street and His Majesty's Building in Commissioner Street. Since railings were an allied requisite to the fire escapes, we began manufacturing them as well. We also became involved in structural engineering and started producing roof trusses as part of the modern

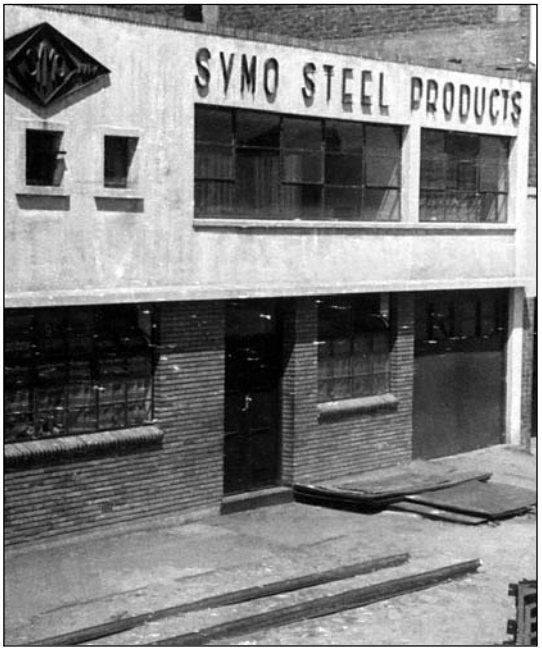


Sydmore Engineering business card.

method of constructing high-rise buildings.

In 1937 we were in a position to buy the property adjoining Harry's at 42 Sivewright Avenue. We called in a Hungarian engineering company, Campel and Woolf who helped build a one-storey building (with provision for a further three-storeys) which we named Seebro House as all four Seeff brothers were equal partners in the venture. We then moved the whole engineering operation over to Doornfontein.

As the business prospered we bought another property behind the existing one in Van Beek Street and built four storeys on that property, and added more floors to Seebro House.



Seebro House in Sivewright Avenue.

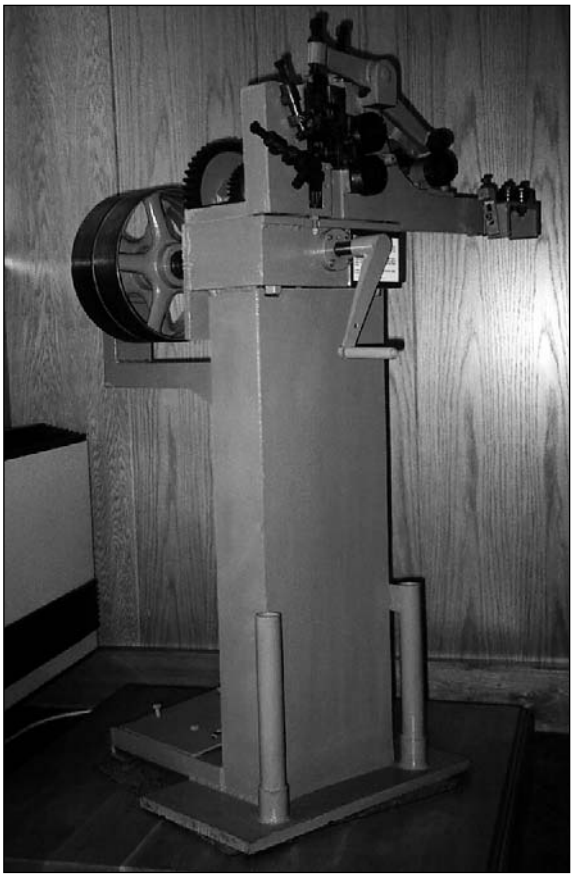
Doornfontein Factory from Van Beek St.

Manufacturing for the war effort

Before the outbreak of World War II, South Africa imported most of its manufactured articles from the United Kingdom, Europe and America. During the war these products were no longer available as many ships carrying imported items were sunk by German U-boats. South Africa was thus forced to source and manufacture items for itself. We were contacted by the War Supply Requisites Office to make products for the war effort. Morris and I were excused from military service as they felt that our manufacturing expertise was vital for the war effort and we were classified as "essential personnel". The first items we produced for the war supplies were identification discs for thousands of soldiers. These were made of oxidised rubber, as there was no plastic material in those days.

Prior to the war, most buttons for trousers were made out of bone which was an expensive item for military uniforms. The government approached us to make buttons out of metal. Brass, a non-ferrous metal, was ideal for this purpose. However, there was a shortage of brass and we had to use steel. Steel, is ferrous and resulted in rust formation when it came into contact with water. In order to overcome this problem, we had to come up with a method of bronzing the buttons. We tumbled the steel buttons in a large barrel together with melted bronze which eventually coated the steel, solving the problem of rusting buttons. The position of the holes had to be extremely accurate otherwise the tailor's needle on his machine would break. Morris adapted one of our existing presses. The original machine made one button with each stroke of the machine. One hundred strokes a minute therefore resulted in one hundred buttons. The army required a far larger quantity so Morris designed a new tool which could make ten buttons with each stroke, thus producing one thousand buttons a minute. Ultimately, we made between fifteen and twenty million buttons.

We were then asked to manufacture split rings to fasten the brass buttons onto the officers' and the soldiers' jackets. Morris went to a scrapyard and managed to scrounge some parts, including various sized gears in order to make a split



Split ring machine.

ring machine. He then designed and built a machine based on a pamphlet of a German machine. In order to produce the required volumes, this machine had to be adapted and mechanised to work automatically. This machine eventually produced one thousand split rings per minute and had to operate day and night in order to fill the demand. During the course of the war this machine must have produced over twenty million split rings. This machine now stands in the foyer of Symo Corporation in Elandsfontein as a reminder of the company's beginnings. We also produced "putties", legging buckles and buckles for belts.

During 1941 the South African Air Force approached us to make plug rings for aircraft, as the ship carrying these items had been sunk by a German U-boat, resulting in the airfield at Voortrekkerhoogte coming to a complete standstill. Plug rings were made out of thirty-six gauge copper which was difficult to curl. Morris had great difficulty with the copper material needed for this task. After many hours of pondering the problem, inspiration came to him in the middle of the night. As soon as he got to work the next day he began to adapt his old methods and invented a more efficient system. The plug ring had to be accurate to the smallest degree in order to ensure the safety of the plane.

We also made gaskets for the aircraft. This necessitated enclosing asbestos in copper. Once again Morris worked out a method to produce the item. All in all we produced plug rings and gaskets sufficient for about fifteen to twenty

thousand aircraft. Many of our products were used in countries as far away as India.

Voortrekkerhoogte also required steel hinges for the various doors in the military carrier aircraft. Compared to the problems we encountered with the copper and bronze items, the hinges were a simple production.

During this time there was also a shortage of door frames, so we started manufacturing these. Steel sheets were not readily available and those we could obtain were of poor quality. We had to take smaller pieces of steel and weld them together to make full sized door frames. Some of our first door frames were for the Boksburg-Benoni Hospital which is still standing today.

Our operation expanded during the course of the war but it must be made clear that we did not exploit the situation. The government controls at that time were very stringent and we abided by the profit stipulated. To cope with this expansion our workforce had to be increased, so we employed a number of German-Jewish refugees. Morris would teach them how to weld at night so that they could work productively during the day. The Government also seconded technical staff to assist us, one of whom was Cecil Bloom, who later became Morris's right-hand man and a director of one of our companies.

Post-war growth

As a result of the war effort, we gained a lot of experience in mass production which was obviously the way of the future. Once the war ended there was no longer a need to supply goods to the army and we had to find other outlets and markets. As we had knowledge about hinge production from our war experience, we began to venture more and more into the ironmongery business. Sydmore Engineering concentrated all its efforts in this direction and Morris managed to obtain imported mechanical presses. In his usual manner, he copied and improved upon these machines. Many of these presses are still used in production.

Sydmore's technical workforce.
BACK ROW: Joe Hadassin, unknown, Mr Erlig, Sydney Seeff, Morris Seeff, Mr Heineman. FRONT ROW: unknown, Mr Bergheim, unknown.

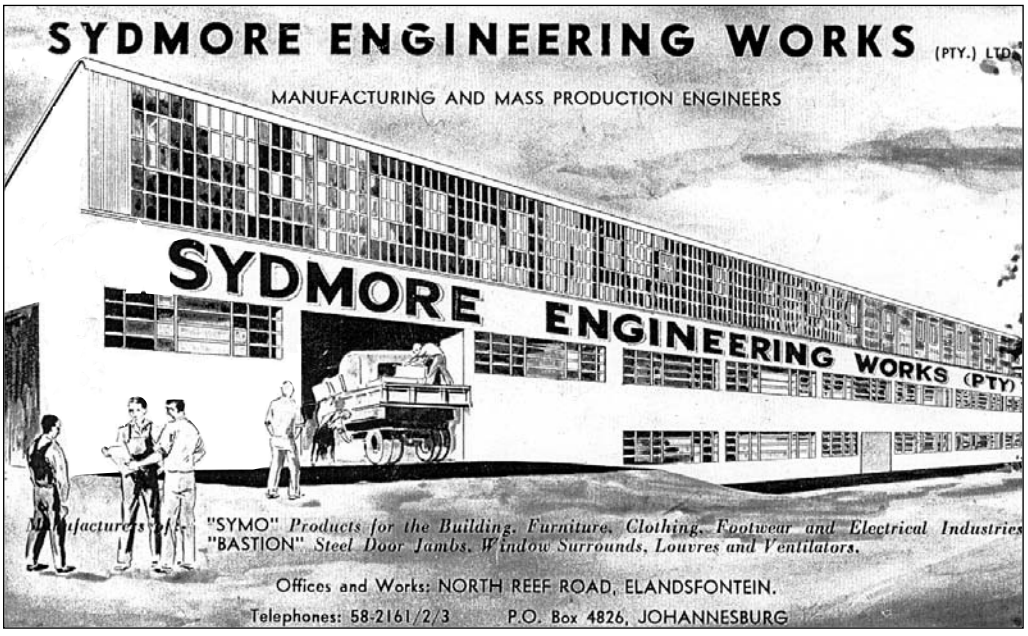
After the war people started to buy imported hinges again and we could not compete with this new development. Morris wanted to close down the hinge division and concentrate our efforts on doors and door jambs. I felt we should continue with hinges and won the argument. Morris was not one to hold a grudge and soon set his mind to finding a way to improve our production of hinges to make it more profitable. He managed to negotiate with a Mr Klaproth who was an overseas investor looking to expand his production of "Solid Hardware", a company making hinges and locks. The end result was an agreement that we would stop making locks and he would stop making hinges. We also bought a Berninghaus hinge machine from Mr Klaproth. This was the predecessor to the fully automatic hinge machine that Morris later developed.

We started forming and acquiring new companies to cope with the diverse range of products we now handled. The first was Cosy Footwear Industries

which manufactured boots and shoes. This was not a very successful venture, so we decided to diversify and began making chairs for the shoe industry instead. We later converted the company to CF Industries and, under that name, we diversified into lockers, stationery cupboards, as well as metal desks.

The growth of the businesses meant that we soon ran out of space and needed to add two floors onto the Seebro property. By that time, Sydmore consisted of five different divisions with different product lines: "C F I" metal office furniture, "Tufco" door and window frames, "Bastion" safes and strongroom doors (incorporating a lock with six levers), "Sydmore" ironmongery and "Power Steel" fire escapes.

We were now utilising all the space in our properties in Sivewright Avenue and Van Beek Street. It was very cumbersome to move steel to the different floors and we were not operating efficiently. This was affecting our profitability. So we looked for new premises in Germiston and the Electron area. With money borrowed from our cousins, we bought fifteen acres in Elandsfontein in 1954-55. We were happy to buy a cheaper site off the main road, but our cousin Sam Seeff, who was in real estate, recommended a property on North Reef Road as


SYDMORE ENGINEERING WORKS (PTY.) LTD.
MANUFACTURING AND MASS PRODUCTION ENGINEERS
SYDMORE ENGINEERING WORKS (PTY)
"SYMO" Products for the Building, Furniture, Clothing, Footwear and Electrical Industries
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Architect's perspective of new factory in Elandsfontein.

Symo corporation – 1997.

it had a better exposure. We built the first building of six thousand square feet and felt that it would be adequate for all our needs. Mr Franklin, our engineer, made a model of the whole Elandsfontein factory but we couldn't really anticipate the fact that one day we would actually build on the entire property. Luckily, this master plan was developed, as over the years we continued to grow and expand. We have now built in every conceivable corner.

By 1957 we had moved from Doornfontein to Elandsfontein and were finally under one roof, with the exception of Power Steel and Morlite.

Staff

I have always believed in the importance of looking after my fellow man. In 1938 we set up a sick benefit fund for our employees. In 1946 this was developed further when we established a non-contributory provident fund for the benefit of all. Another provident and life fund was initiated in 1957. This was so progressive with its benefits at the time that the rules were used as a model for many other funds such as Standard Bank's pension fund.

The benefits to the employees is worked out in such a way that each member is credited each month/set period of time according to the formula:

$$\frac{\text{salary}}{25} \times \frac{(\text{years of approved service} \times 2) - 1}{12}$$

If the employee has worked less than 25 years, 25 is replaced by "n" which is the benefit age minus the actual age (to the nearest birthday) plus years of approved service.

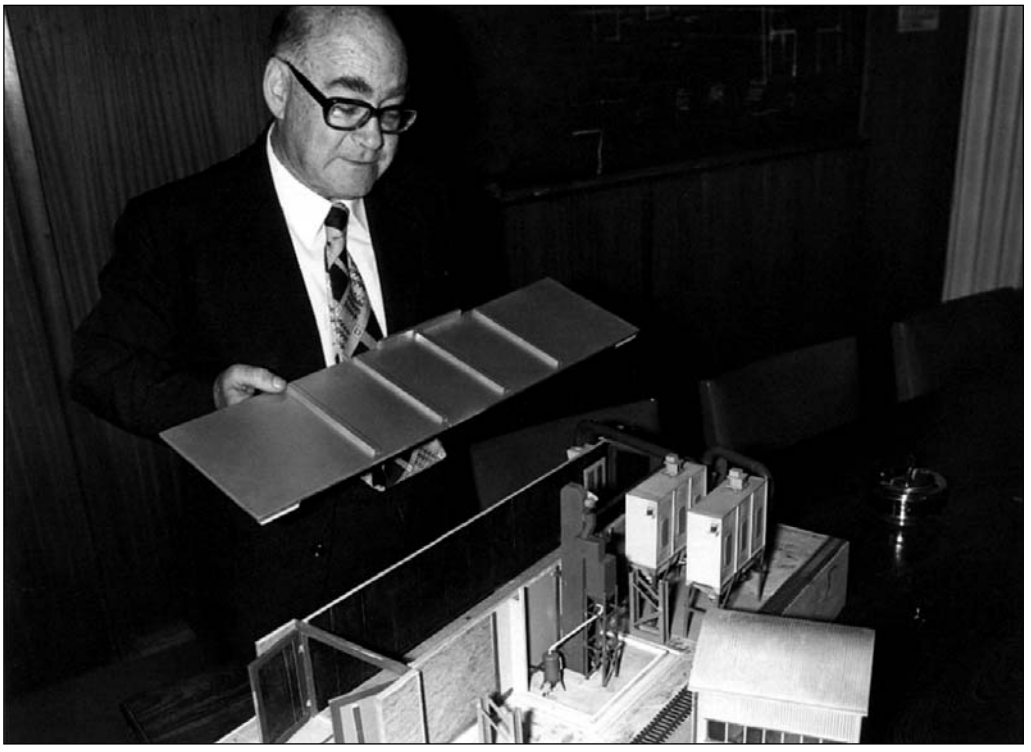
Some of our employees have worked for our group for over forty years, and we always strived to ensure they were adequately provided for in their retirement.

Power Steel

Our existing structural steel division was booming and it soon became clear that we would need larger premises. We could no longer spill out onto the wide pavement! When our turnover in Sydmore Structural was more than one thousand pounds a month, we formed a new company called Power Steel, headed by Benny Caplan, our accountant's brother-in-law who was a structural engi-

neer. In 1947 we bought a large plot of land in Wadeville, for both Sydmore and Power Steel, but, once again things did not work out as we planned. Power Steel landed up needing the whole site in Wadeville.

By 1958 Power Steel was well-established and making an impact on the structural industry. There were many contracts with Escom for the erection of sub-stations and we worked jointly with a company in England to produce pylons for the carrying of electricity cables. During this time we were approached to sell our company to a larger group who were then going to go public on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The terms of this deal were not particularly attractive and we rejected the offer. However, a seed had been sown and, when we reached an annual turnover of R1.5 million in 1965, we decided to list the company on our own. We approached the law firm of Werksmans and organised the flotation in about six months. The share was offered at fifty five cents and opened at sixty six cents. Benny Caplan remained the managing director, while I was appointed chairman.



Power Steel – Benny Caplan

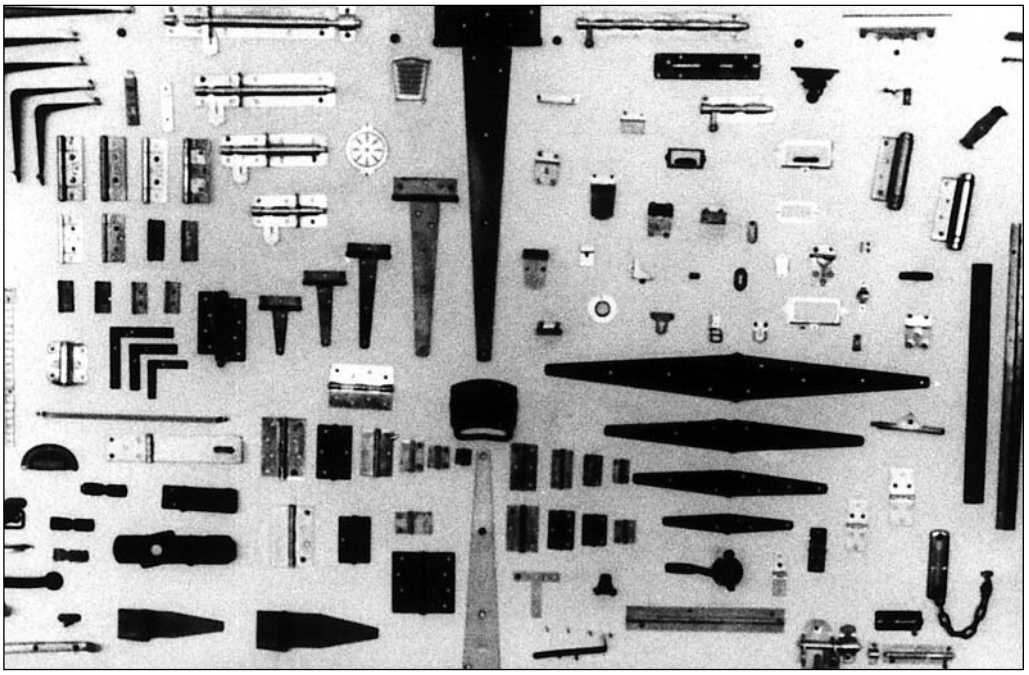
Morlite Construction

We bought a company, Tufco, which manufactured steel windows and was initially run by Henry Ulfane. After the war we changed the trading name to Morlite. Morlite continued to expand and soon moved from Doornfontein into premises at Hangar 10 at the Rand Airport in Germiston. Under the guidance of Sydney Greenberg as the new managing director, the business grew rapidly and we decided to float off this company as well, listing it on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in 1968. The listing was most successful, and we were nominated one of the top hundred companies for two years in a row.

Sydney and Goldie Greenberg with Naomi.

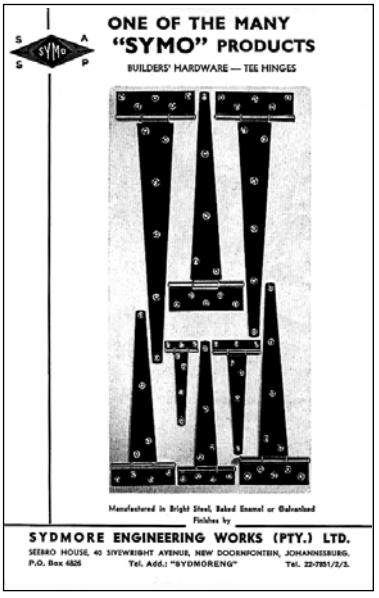
Elandsfontein expansion

The business grew and so did the range of our products. In the 1950s we decided to expand our advertising budget and for three years we exhibited at the Rand Easter Show at Milner Park in Johannesburg. The campaign proved to be very successful.



Sydmore range of products.

Exhibition at the Rand Easter Show.

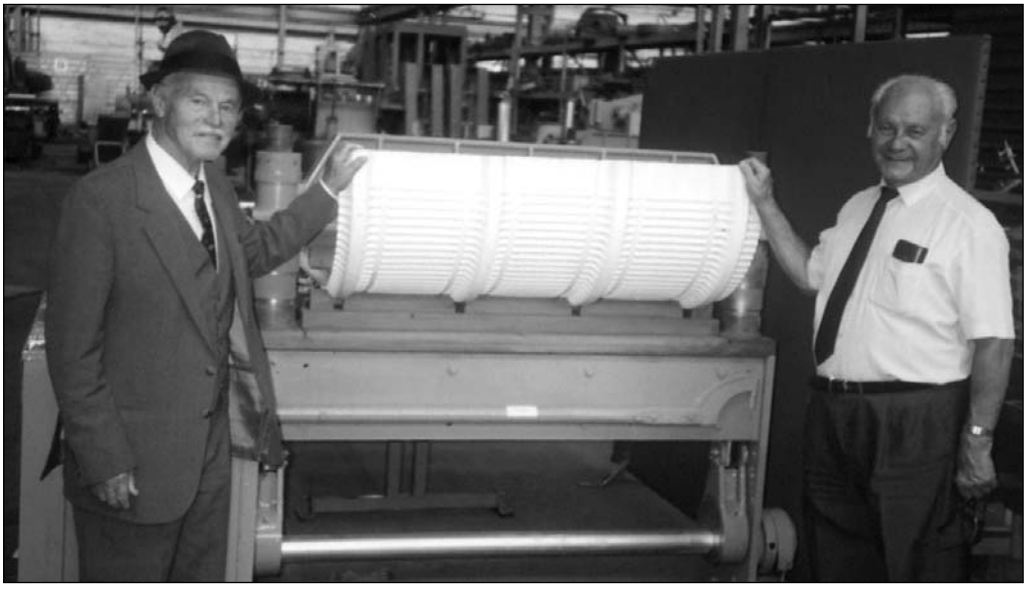

ONE OF THE MANY
"SYMO" PRODUCTS
BUILDERS' HARDWARE — TEE HINGES
Manufactured in Bright Steel, Baked Enamel or Galvanised
Finishes by
SYDMORE ENGINEERING WORKS (PTY.) LTD.
SEERRO HOUSE, 40 SIVEWRIGHT AVENUE, NEW DOORNFONTEIN, JOHANNESBURG.
P.O. Box 4626
Tel. Add.: "SYDMORENG"
Tel. 22-7851/2/3.

Sydmore advertisement.

Steel rolling corporation

We were always looking for new markets and more modern methods of manufacture. Morris was very interested in roof sheeting and made enquiries about buying a machine from an English company. The price was exhorbitant. Morris was undeterred and took a catalogue of a rolling mill, enlarged the photographs and, using this as a guide, began building his own machine. He was able to produce roof sheeting but each sheet had a kinked flaw. Morris, being a perfectionist, agonised over this slight flaw. After many hours and much wastage of material, my brother worked out a way to perfect the system by adding an additional stiffening groove. Steel Rolling Corporation was formed in 1964 and traded as V R Rolling, named after the profile of the roof sheeting itself. It was run as a subsidiary of Morlite.

Soon after we went into production, one of our salesmen took an order for sheeting that needed to be curved. Morris was aghast. Metal sheeting could not be bent perfectly because one side was in tension and the other in compression,



Morris and I holding a sheet of bent metal.

Heathrow terminal, London.

so the curve could not be made without distorting the material. Try bending a drinking straw so that the inside of the straw remains intact. Morris never turned his back on a challenge. He got to work designing a system whereby a sheet could be bent neatly, accurately and efficiently. He adjusted a bending brake, made a special die and, in the blink of an eye, the sheet could be controlled to bend to any angle. (The method used nowadays on modern plastic straws is based on the principle Morris developed.)

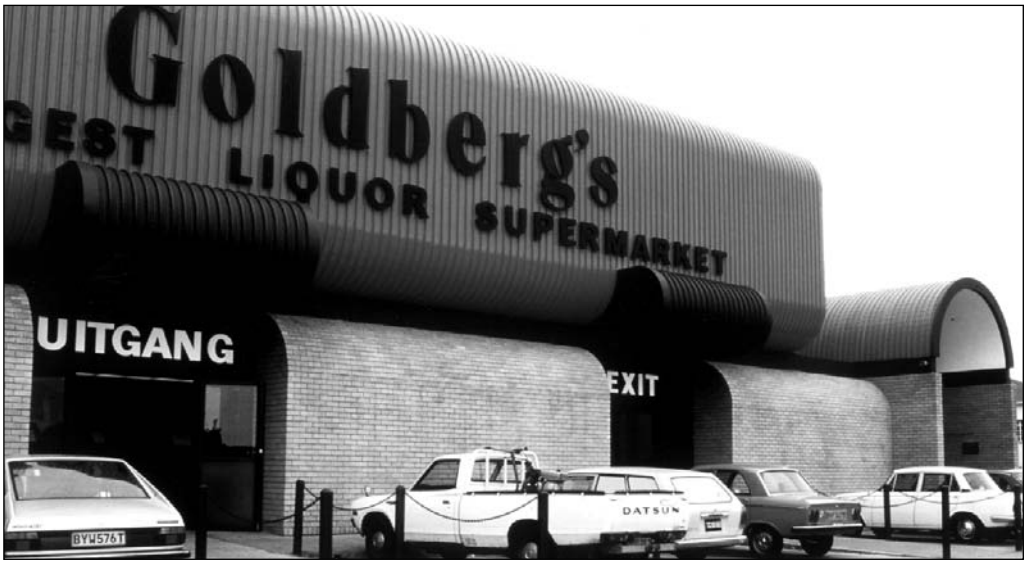
Like so many other great inventions, the idea was simple and with hindsight seemed so obvious. Yet so many people had tried to bend metal before but had failed.

My brother and I both realised the enormity of this discovery and how it could affect and benefit the building industry. We therefore took out a world patent on this idea (SA patent 64/5022 for curving trapezoidal metal sheeting). It did not take long for manufacturing companies all over the world to use this method of building, and architects began to use bent sheeting as part of their designs. One of the first major buildings to use our patent was the Pick ‘n Pay Hypermarket in Boksburg and, later, the arrivals terminal at Heathrow Airport in London. Morris continued to improve the patent and, in 1970, a second patent (SA patent 70/8282 for metal cladding sheets) was registered. These patents covered 40

countries worldwide. As a result of this invention, roof cladding could be bent on site either inward or outward, or both resulting in an S-bend. Not only did the architects and builders recognise the importance of Morris's invention, so did the whole industry. In 1983 our company was awarded the prestigious Shell Award for this product.

Grandstand at University of Witwatersrand.

Shell award for the cranking machine – 1983.
Morris, Bernard, Stanley, Ruth and Sydney.



Benny Goldberg's – Wynberg, Johannesburg.

Shelving and racking

Not only did Morris concentrate on improving the Steel Rolling Corporation, he also set his mind to improving our shelving and racking systems. Our patent for adjustable shelving was well received and we were awarded a large contract to supply the Johannesburg Municipal Library with shelving for its underground archives library in central Johannesburg. He invented a system which was easy to install, yet was extremely sturdy, resulting in us securing large contracts with the South African Defence Force. We also managed to get orders for prestige jobs such as the JG Strydom Hospital and the Mercedes Benz spare parts centre in Pinetown.

Today CF Industries is one of the most progressive companies in the Symo Corporation Group. They produce large-scale storage systems, mobile shelving, racking mezzanine flooring and factory lockers.

Shelving in Johannesburg archives library.

Diversification

Over the years, production in our factory has always been adaptable and diverse. I was never afraid of a challenge and many of our acquisitions came as a result of helping people in difficult circumstances. Certain enterprises worked and we continued with them, while others did not succeed and we had to close them down. We have made freezers and fridges, heaters, stoves, solar heating, prefabricated housing, windows, and knock-down door frames. The list is long and has given us many headaches as well as a tremendous sense of achievement.

The second generation at Sydmore

Front: Sydney and Morris. Back: Stanley and Bernard Seeff (1977)

My son Stanley was always interested in the factory and as a little boy would join me on my Sunday visits to the office. When he completed his schooling and decided to do his training in tool and die-making, it was natural for him to do his apprenticeship at our factory. When he qualified, he knew about many aspects of the business. Even in those early days it was evident that he had wonderful people skills and could work and co-operate with people from

different walks of life. Even though Stanley is an only child, Naomi and I never spoilt him. As a result he never held himself higher than others, which has always stood him in good stead.

Stanley worked at the factory for five years before Bernard, Morris's son joined us. During that time Stanley worked in most departments and gained an understanding of the company as a whole. He enjoyed some aspects but not all. Being the good son he is, he endured it all and never stopped learning. When the factory had deadlines to reach and work continued through the night, Stanley did not shirk his duties and stayed at work to see the job through. Stanley and Bernard are a lot like Morris and myself in that we lead by example. We do not ask others to do things that we ourselves are not prepared to undertake.

Stanley progressed from making oil-heaters to running the hardware division for a number of years as production manager. As I watched my son develop I always felt very proud of him and his ability. In the past few years I have been going to work every day, but it is Stanley who has the actual control and ultimate responsibility.

Bernard joined the company in 1976. He had obtained an engineering degree from the University of the Witwatersrand and an MBA from the Univesity of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in America. While in America, Bernard became fascinated with computers and is very proficient in their use. It is thanks to Bernard that we have a smooth-running computer operation and efficient systems have been installed throughout the whole company. Our accounts, orders, deliveries and other administration are all on the cutting edge of technology. I must say I don't understand all the intricacies of computers but I am delighted by the new developments.

It became an easy decision to divide the control of the company between Stanley and Bernard. Bernard organises the administrative aspects while Stanley is involved in sales and production – a reversal of Morris and my roles! Morris and I were very fortunate that our sons were happy to join their fathers in business and work so well together. Their relationship is better than many brothers, they bear no malice nor jealousy towards each other. They share an adjoining office and still find a need to talk to each other on their cellphones on their way home at night. A truly amazing relationship.

Morris's eldest daughter Ruth joined us in 1979 as a public relations officer. She had studied psychology as part of a BA degree and put her valuable skills to use within the structure of our business. She made many innovative changes at a time in South Africa when unions were not very active. She introduced

company uniforms and established liaison committees between management and workers. She built up a much more positive image within the company. In 1989 she decided to branch out on her own and formed a security fencing company, called Metawall. Ruth operates from our premises in Elandsfontein and it is always a pleasure to sit and have lunch with her in our executive dining room.

When members of the new generation became involved they felt it was necessary to upgrade our image in the marketplace. Up till then, the various companies which had been formed on an ad hoc basis operated individually but from the same premises in Elandsfontein. Discussions were held and it was decided to form a holding company and include all the various smaller companies under one company called Symo Corporation. A new logo was designed and the Group benefited from this new image. I was very proud of Ruth, Stanley and Bernard's determination to plan and execute the whole operation. I can certainly see how much easier it is to run one corporate group.

Old Symo logo.

New Symo logo.

Fifty year celebration

In 1982 Symo celebrated its golden jubilee. We have a very loyal staff and there were many members who had been with us for forty years or more and a few who had been with us since our inception. Presentations for long service awards were made at a special ceremony where Owen Horwood, the Minister of

Finance, was the Guest of Honour.

Thirteen members of staff had been with us for more than thirty-five years. Betty Adelman, Cecil Bloom, William Mahlungu, Philamon Mnisi, Stephen Ntsieme, Monty Miller, Paulus Kubutu, Jack Gaylis, Golda Ostroff, Jan Pretorius, Albert Rosenbaum and Marika Mlauza each received a silver tea service. Those who had worked for the company for over twenty-five years received a watch.

Presenting awards at the Golden Jubilee in 1982.

Stanley, Morris, Owen Horwood, Sydney, Bernard and Ruth
at the Jubilee celebration.

Sydney and Morris with long-service workers.
BACK ROW (from left): Daniel Ramoba, Johannes Thlamela, Samson Rambuda, Sydney, Morris, John Mabena, John Mahlangu, Slingsby Sefuba (Group Personel Officer) FRONT ROW: Joshua Mbele, Jackson Makhubela, Abel Makubela, Petrus Sebambe, Sizula Tito.

Symo continues into the future

We have had much success in our business, although some years were very difficult. Being an industry primarily allied to the building cycle, whenever there was an upturn in the economy we profited, whereas when there was a slump we were adversely affected. Morris and I developed the company under these circumstances and Stanley and Bernard continue to do so. They have been able to weather the storm and constantly research and develop new products after consulting with Morris and me. We give them advice, we discuss and argue, but ultimately it is Stanley and Bernard who take the final decisions.

There have been changes of product over the years. However, C F Industries still manufactures shelving. Our storage systems are the only ones in South Africa to have been awarded the ISO 9001 and 9002 certificates for quality assurance. Over recent years the younger generation have adopted a more aggressive selling approach as well as developing new lines and I am proud to say we have captured a large share of the local market. C F Industries also produces steel lockers and other furniture for which we have been awarded the SABS quality mark. Besides the local market, ten percent of the division's merchandise is exported to the United Kingdom, Denmark and Germany.

Telephone booths

The sheet metal division manufactures a wide range of fabricated metal products. Some of these are "jobbing contracts" such as voting boxes for elections, trolleys, dustbins and many items for the Post Office. Components are also made for the housing division.

A relatively recent addition to our range has been the manufacture of telephone booths,

which was initially developed by Stanley in conjunction with Telkom. The product has been used extensively in South Africa, and is now being exported into Africa.

Another company is our housing division. Recognising the need for low cost housing in South Africa, Stanley helped developed a modular system, called Symodule. Although the system was intended for the housing market, we have achieved better results producing prefabricated houses used for accommodation at building sites, road works and similar projects. It is very popular as a "Spaza", which is a convenience store set up on a property, usually in less developed areas.

Symodule classroom.

PORTAL FIVE

part 1

From darkness

The stormy thirties

After the Wall Street crash in 1929, magnates became paupers overnight. In the USA alone, more than a million people had, in one way or another, invested on the Stock Exchange. The collapse of the market led to grinding poverty and mass unemployment. The effects of the collapse began to be felt world-wide during the 1930s. All over the world banks went into liquidation and money was steeply devalued. In Germany, it ultimately led to the emergence of Hitler and his Nazi Party and the creation of the Third Reich with the aim of seizing world power for Germany.

The thirties were a time of general social unrest in South Africa too, linked to poverty and unemployment. There was the fear of Communism since the Bolshevik uprising. The result of all these events was the introduction of harsh controls to restrict the admission of alien immigrants. Dr D F Malan, as Minister of the Interior, took it upon himself to introduce restrictive legislation in the form of the Immigration Quota Act which came into force on 1 May 1930. This Act limited the number of immigrants allowed into the country, no matter their race or creed. At the time it was denied that the law was directed against Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. However, years later Dr Malan admitted that was in fact the reason.[3] One of Dr Malan's doctrines was that of "assimilability." "Every nation should be homogeneous as far as possible," he said.

The great wave of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe created, in his view, "a nervousness among all sections of the population".

The Quota Act had the immediate effect of reducing Jewish immigration to South Africa. Interestingly enough, Germany was not included as one of the countries on the Quota list and several thousand Jews from Germany managed to escape and find refuge in South Africa. From 1933 onward, the latent anti-Semitism in South Africa flared up as a result of increased German influence in parts of the community. The Quota Act was repealed and replaced by the Aliens Act which required all non-British subjects to be screened by a selection board.

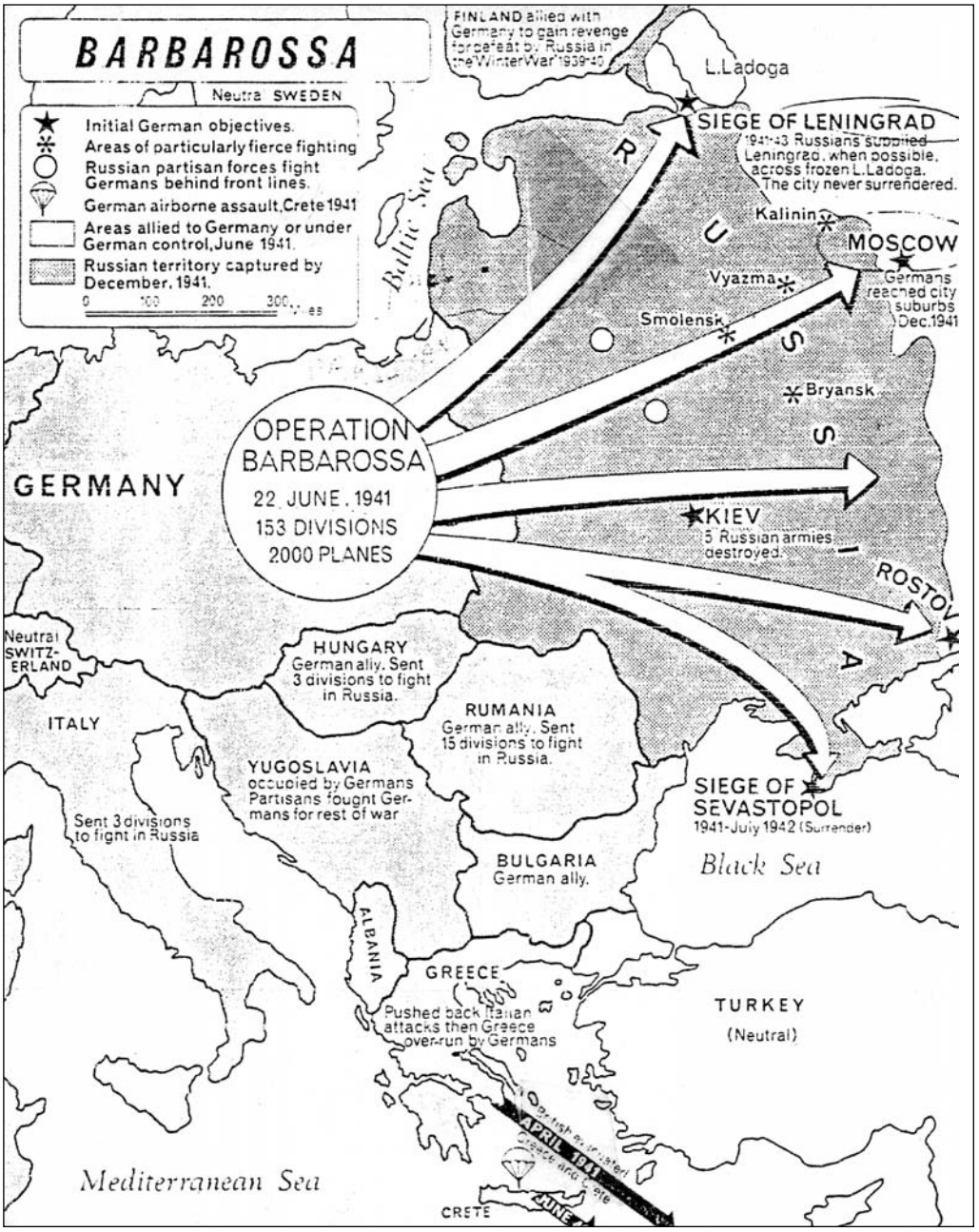
[3] The Jews in South Africa, Saron and Hotz p378

There were many who still regarded this Act as ineffective and demanded the cessation of all immigration. The traditional attitude of tolerance that had existed in South Africa towards Jews was beginning to change. Anti-Jewish policies were being systematically advocated by various organisations and groups. The rise of anti-Jewish parties expressed itself in the various "Shirt Movements", especially the Greyshirts of the Eastern Cape. Towards the end of 1936 there were definite signs of the Nationalist Party showing anti-Semitic tendencies.

Fortunately the years of crisis ended on a brighter note. As economic conditions improved the Afrikaners were no longer as fearful of aliens coming to usurp their place in the economic arena. Before the general elections of 1948, strong sections of the Nationalist Party succeeded in having anti-Jewish policies discarded. However, for my family the effects of the Quota System and the Aliens Act were devastating.

Operation Barbarossa

The Second World War broke out early in September 1939. Poland was overrun by the mighty German army in a matter of days. Millions of Jews were caught and eventually exterminated. On 22 June 1941 the German Operation Barbarossa was launched on a front extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Panzers swarmed all over Western Russia. A million Russians were taken prisoner; thousands were killed. However, like Napoleon before him, Hitler had failed to take the harsh Russian winter into account, and in the end the Russians, unbelievably, forced the Germans back. When Hitler, *yimach shemo*, entered this vast area, he ordered the immediate destruction of all Jewish leaders, both spiritual and communal, by specially trained "SS" soldiers who followed his all-conquering armies. His orders were implicitly and ruthlessly carried out, with the willing assistance of local anti-Semites especially the Lithuanians and Latvians.



Map showing Operation Barbarossa.

Rivel and her family

I was very fortunate to have escaped the hell of Eastern Europe before the vicious machinery of destruction descended. For decades I have grieved over my dear sister Rivel who was caught in the Holocaust with her husband and two children. How we tried to bring them out! Alas, we apparently did not try hard enough, nor fast enough. To this day I cannot forgive myself for this failure.

Rivel was possibly the most versatile of all the siblings in our family. She was as bright as the proverbial penny. My sister was a *beriya* (efficient). This title is not given to any woman, only to an *eshet chayil* (a woman of worth). She was indeed a woman of valour, who excelled at whatever she undertook. She was marvellous in an emergency situation and could always be relied upon. I first became aware of her special abilities during our exile in Pochinki. She was a constant help to my mother and I'm sure her efforts made the family's ordeal easier to bear. When we returned to Krakenowo in 1921 she helped my parents in the shop. She was quick and alert at all times and was a wonderful sales-person.

Rivel and Woolf's wedding at my parents' home – September 1933
Back row: Unknown, Unknown, Charlie, Unknown, Rodel, 3 yeshiva bochers.
Front row: Nina, yeshiva bocher, Chana Sora, Rivel, Woolf, Sholem Ze'ev, Unknown, Unknown.

Rivel, Woolf, Beila and Hirschel Kuznec.

My sister was also a communal activist. Rivel, more than anyone else in our family, took part in educational and congregational affairs. On several occasions she was elected as a delegate to go to Kovno for conferences which were concerned with Jewish affairs affecting the community throughout Lithuania both economically as well as politically. She was always interested in matters regarding the *kehilla* and was devout in her belief.

Rivel married Velvel (Woolf) Kuznec in 1933. The following year a baby girl was born to them. They named her Beila after our Bobba Beila, our father's mother, who had died in Russia. By the time the war had broken out, they had a second child, a son Hirschel, named after Woolf's father.

Rivel and Woolf's plight

In 1935 we managed to arrange for my parents, Rodel, Charlie and Nina to come to South Africa. At the time it was agreed that as soon as we could, we would organise for Rivel, Woolf and Beila to join us. We had to apply on a separate application for the Kuznec family as Rivel was already married and not dependent on our parents. My brothers and I set to work immediately and filled out the very many forms and wrote the necessary affidavits. Each letter we received from Rivel described the increasing deterioration of everyday life as a result of the economy. They expressed an urgent desire to join us all in this new country. I have kept several letters:

22. 4. 1935

My dear and loving brother Zundel

We received a letter from you last week. It is now after Pesach and we have not had time to reply to your letter. As you can imagine we had a lot of work to do since the house and the shop are separated from each other. When we read your letter we were pleased to hear that you have not forgotten your old good habit of writing letters (as we say here). Although you are already in South Africa you have not forgotten about us in Lithuania and you still have this country in your mind.

We feel very alone and without a friend. What shall I tell you dear Zundel, we are like sheep without a shepherd. We have no friends, no relatives and very little community. I remember the family time we used to have before our family was separated; how *heimlich* it was to sit around the Pesach table and sing all those wonderful songs together. I loved that time and did not want to get up from the table. Now we had only one couple sitting with us at the seder. In the middle our little daughter (she should be well), could not sit still. We thought she was too young to sit with us, but she insisted. What could we do? She should be well and you will see her for yourself one day what a lovely child she is (*kein en hora*). She is a proper little *mensch*, not too fat and not too thin. You would all love her and kiss her. She is (*kein en hora*) a lively child and when it gets warm (please G-d) we will take a photo of her and send it to you. You will then see that I don't have "glass eyes" as they say "a mother has glass eyes. While the child is not a beauty" – she always thinks her child is best. I really think she is beautiful!

What should I write to you? I would like to be with you all already. Dearest Zundel I thank you for all the steps you have taken to bring us to you. Here in Lithuania we must remain alone. Christian shops are opening up and the Jews that remain here are left without a livelihood. Many families are leaving. Some go to Palestine, others discuss where they will land up. There will be very little left in Krakenowo in a few years.

Now I must finish off. I send regards to our dear parents, brothers, sister, sisters-in-law, Rodel and Bezalel.

Rivka (Rivel)

Woolf wrote a few days later:

26.4.1935

Dear Brother-in law Zundel

I received your encouraging letter and thank you very much for all your efforts regarding us. In your letter you wrote that you want to write every week; that is very pleasing to us. Rivka is not suprised at your behaviour, but I am pleased to note that I have such a loving brother-in-law who is endeavouring to organise the papers which we need to come to South Africa.

You write that you have made inquiries at a nearby town for work for me and that you have asked them if they would employ me as a rabbi, shochet and mohel and that they would give you a reply soon. What kind of town is it? How many Jewish families do they have? Do they have a shochet and if not, where do they get their meat from? How far is the town from Johannesburg? What salary does a rabbi get there? In general I am interested in getting an all round position which includes rabbi, shochet and mohel. I would like to use my qualifications which I have worked very hard for in my life.

I received a letter from the parents a few weeks ago telling us about their life in South Africa. I believe you were all together as a family for Pesach.

Business is not very good as sales are poor. The grain price is low which means that the farmers are not making much money, which means they have no money to buy their requirements from our shop. We also have difficulty running our house and shop as they are not next to each other. We have a Christian woman who helps us in the house but we do not like to leave little Beila with her. We cannot afford help in the shop and so we have to run between the shop and the house all the time.

I send regards to the parents, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, Pnina, Rodel, Gershon and Bezalel.

Woolf Kuznec

The next letter I have from my sister is written much later. The situation in Lithuania had deteriorated further. We sent money and encouragement to our family. What we could not send them were papers to leave. My brothers and I made affidavits on their behalf. We made applications to Pretoria – but it was all to no avail. I have included all these affidavits in the addendum as well as Woolf's qualifications from his yeshivas. I used all these certificates to get him a job in South Africa and prove to the authorities that he was needed in South

Africa and that the Kuznec family would not be a burden on the state. As I said before, it all came to nought.

A F F I D A V I T

I, the undersigned,

SYDNEY SSEFF

do hereby make oath and say:-

1. That I am carrying on business as Mechanical Engineers at 42, Sivewright Avenue, Doornfontein.

2. That I am a Director of the business carried on under the style of Sydmore Engineering Works (Proprietary) Limited.

3. That I am desirous of obtaining a permit in terms of the Immigration Laws of the Union of South Africa for the entry into the Union of South Africa by my brother-in-law WOOLF KUSNETZ

4. That the said WOOLF KUSNETZ is presently residing in Krakinova, Lithuania.

5...../

- 2 -

5. That should a permit be granted I hereby undertake to support the said WOOLF KUSNETZ.

6. I hereby guarantee that the said WOOLF KUSNETZ will in no way be a liability or burden to any public or private charitable institution of the Union of South Africa.

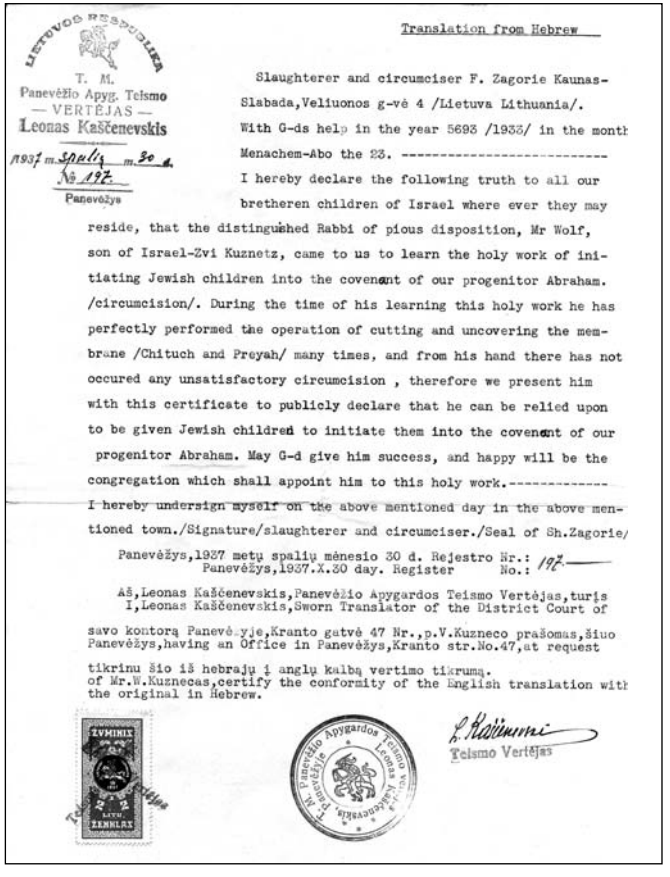
7. I furthermore undertake to pay any deposit in cash which may be required by the Immigration Authorities as and when a permit has been granted.

SWORN TO AT JOHANNESBURG, on this ~~30th~~ 7th day of June, 1939, and the deponent acknowledged that he knows and understands the contents of this Affidavit.

COMMISSIONER OF OATHS:

TRANSVAAL
EX-OFFICIO Attorney of the
Supreme Court of South Africa,
Transvaal Provincial Division.

My affidavit for Woolf Kuznec (Harry and Morris' are in Appendix III)



LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKA
T. M.
Panevėžio Apyg. Teismo
— VERTĖJAS —
Leonas Kaščenevskis
1937 m. Spalių m. 30 d.
№ 197
Panevėžys

Translation from Hebrew

Slaughterer and circumciser F. Zagorie Kaunas-Slabada,Veliuonos g-vė 4 /Lietuva Lithuania/. With G-ds help in the year 5693 /1933/ in the month Menachem-Abo the 23. ----------

I hereby declare the following truth to all our bretheren children of Israel where ever they may reside, that the distinguished Rabbi of pious disposition, Mr Wolf, son of Israel-Zvi Kuznetz, came to us to learn the holy work of initiating Jewish children into the covenant of our progenitor Abraham. /circumcision/. During the time of his learning this holy work he has perfectly performed the operation of cutting and uncovering the membrane /Chituch and Preyah/ many times, and from his hand there has not occured any unsatisfactory circumcision , therefore we present him with this certificate to publicly declare that he can be relied upon to be given Jewish children to initiate them into the covenant of our progenitor Abraham. May G-d give him success, and happy will be the congregation which shall appoint him to this holy work.----------

I hereby undersign myself on the above mentioned day in the above mentioned town./Signature/slaughterer and circumciser./Seal of Sh.Zagorie/

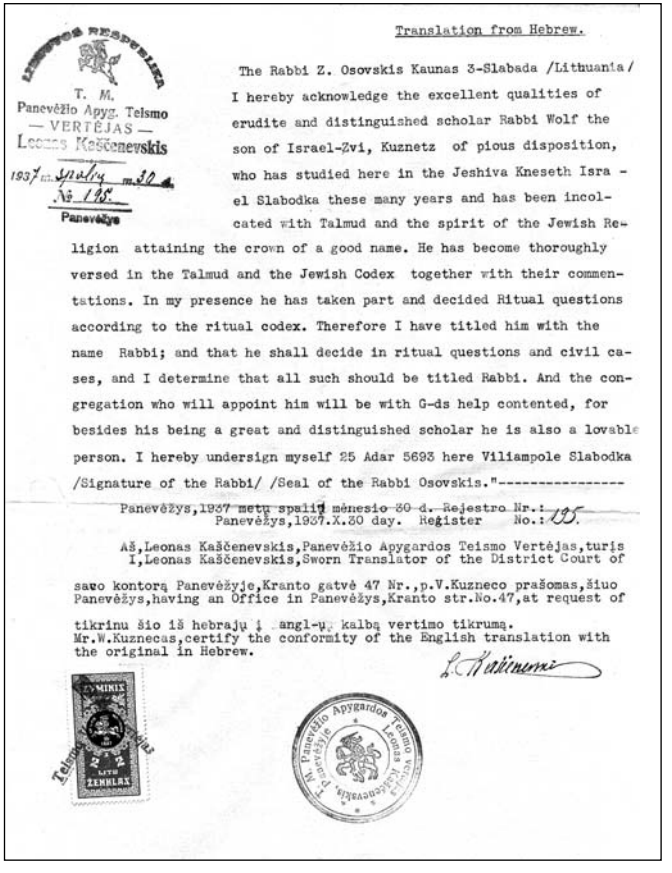
Panevėžys,1937 metų spalių mėnesio 30 d. Rejestro Nr.: 197
Panevėžys,1937.X.30 day. Register No.:

Aš,Leonas Kaščenevskis,Panevėžio Apygardos Teismo Vertėjas,turis I,Leonas Kaščenevskis,Sworn Translator of the District Court of savo kontorą Panevėžyje,Kranto gatvė 47 Nr.,p.V.Kuzneco prašomas,šiuo Panevėžys,having an Office in Panevėžys,Kranto str.No.47,at request of tikrinu šio iš hebrajų į anglų kalbą vertimo tikrumą. Mr.W.Kuznecas,certify the conformity of the English translation with the original in Hebrew.

Teismo Vertėjas

ŽVMINIX
LITU
ŽEMĖLAX

Panevėžio Apygardos Teismo Leonas Kaščenevskis



LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKA
T. M.
Panevėžio Apyg. Teismo
— VERTĖJAS —
Leonas Kaščenevskis
1937 m. Spalių m. 30 d.
№ 195
Panevėžys

Translation from Hebrew.

The Rabbi Z. Osovskis Kaunas 3-Slabada /Lithuania/ I hereby acknowledge the excellent qualities of erudite and distinguished scholar Rabbi Wolf the son of Israel-Zvi, Kuznetz of pious disposition, who has studied here in the Jeshiva Kneseth Israel Slabodka these many years and has been incolcated with Talmud and the spirit of the Jewish Religion attaining the crown of a good name. He has become thoroughly versed in the Talmud and the Jewish Codex together with their commentations. In my presence he has taken part and decided Ritual questions according to the ritual codex. Therefore I have titled him with the name Rabbi; and that he shall decide in ritual questions and civil cases, and I determine that all such should be titled Rabbi. And the congregation who will appoint him will be with G-ds help contented, for besides his being a great and distinguished scholar he is also a lovable person. I hereby undersign myself 25 Adar 5693 here Viliampole Slabodka /Signature of the Rabbi/ /Seal of the Rabbi Osovskis."----------

Panevėžys,1937 metų spalių mėnesio 30 d. Rejestro Nr.: 195.
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ŽVMINIX
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Panevėžio Apygardos Teismo Leonas Kaščenevskis

Reference for Woolf Kuznec from Rabbi Osovskis and Rabbi Sh Zagorie at *Knesset Yisroel Yeshiva* in Slabodka.

The following letter is dated 1939 and the tone has become much more desperate. You can just imagine how we felt in South Africa, unable to really help those we loved!

20 2 1939

Dear Parents, all my dear brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law and nephew Bezalel

I have not had a letter from any of you for over three weeks! G-d only knows what has happened. We were getting letters every week and sometimes even twice a week. Now we wait for the postman to come and he tells us he has nothing.

There is not much happening here besides the problems with the economy. Prices are very inflated. Sugar now costs one Lit and sixty cents a kilogram and we can only pay with special cards. Salt has become very scarce. On 1 March they say the price will go from twenty cents a kilogram to sixty cents a kilogram. Other products are not available as factories are waiting for the prices to go higher. The whole world is having difficulties with things being so expensive, but here in Lithuania we have even more problems. As merchants we are not allowed to raise our prices, if we are caught we have to pay one hundred Lit penalty, even if the increase is as little as five cents. Everyone is afraid to buy things at the more expensive price. Had we bought supplies earlier at the cheaper prices we could have made a good profit. Unfortunately we did not have enough money. If we did have extra cash Woolf could have gone to Kovno and gotten cheap goods. Alas we could not do that either, in fact we have not been able to go to town the whole of winter! I would like to ask you to send us money.

Beila and Hirschel send regards. I greet Abe, Gertie, Heisel, Rita, Rodel, Bezalel, Zundel, Maisha and Pnina.

Rivel Kuznec

Woolf included a letter with the above one.

Dear Parents, brothers-in-law, sister-in-law and nephew

I wanted to write to you at the same time as Rivka. We wish to know what is happening to you all as we have not had a letter for a long time. We may be far away from each other but we all live in the same world and I believe many things in South Africa are the same as here. Goods are rising all the time. What we sell today becomes so much more expensive to buy the next day. If there was a chance to buy a lot of goods it would be better for us, but we need lots of money. Those who do have money and have bought and resold have become quite wealthy. When time is as unsettled as it is now and a war is looming, whoever has money and wisdom can save up a lot. As you know we can do

nothing as we have no money. We are strapped for cash, we owe money and have many debts. It is also getting more difficult to buy for credit and we cannot get goods with promissory notes. The interest for debt repayment is very high. Please try to send us money through Nissan and he will give it to us immediately as we trust him.

In the meantime it is taking us a long time to leave this country. We have no money for goods and we therefore have no income. A person cannot survive when they have no money. If we had money we could buy and sell and live quite well.

As regards my papers we received a letter from Fital. He told us that we should perhaps try different ways to get into Africa if the South African authorities do not allow us to enter. We also received a letter from Pretoria saying we must give new facts. Can you go to Pretoria for us with the guarantees that you have for me? Perhaps they will reconsider our application. We are not sure if they received the papers and application you sent. If not we should send both sets to Pretoria again!

I send regards to all

Woolf Kuznec

Rivel and Woolf

The remaining letter was dated later that year:

25.7.39

My dear and loving parents, brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephew and niece

We received the parcels from you. Everything was lovely, thank you. It only cost us one Lit and seventy-five cents to get it from the post office. Heisel and Rivel thank you for the knitted suit and green trousers for Hirschel and the pullover for Beila. They are all lovely and very useful. You should have *nachas* and joy from your little baby girl Basia Bluma-Hoda. Avraham Yitzchak and Gitel thank you for the suit. It was a bit small, but we gave it to the tailor and he made it the correct size for only five Lit and it now looks very good. Pnina, thank you for the three dresses and two aprons. I gave the aprons to Pesa Chaia (our cousin). Thank you also for the gloves and scarves for Woolf as well as the two shirts and night shirt and other small things. Everything arrived in good condition.

Our papers have been attended to. Woolf went to Kovno on Monday and Tuesday to swear an oath at the British Consul. We then sent the papers by registered post. We will send the other papers by ordinary post as they are heavy and it will be too expensive.

I spoke to Nachman, who has connections with the bank about the money. He will tell us when it arrives. His wife Lena has not been well. We all went to the forest and she felt much better. The trip was good for all of us. I went again with the children. We are having lovely weather for this time of the year and we have even being swimming. Hirschel is afraid of the water and screams when I take him in. He is (*kein ein hora*) a lovely active child. He is now trying to walk, but still falls very often. My neighbour says only a mother has patience to watch a child. He is now becoming a proper little *mensch* (he should be well and grow) and I have been rewarded for my patience. Beila is also a lovely child, but she has been having tonsil trouble. She is very thin and doesn't seem to get better.

The next time you send money to us, please send it via Nissan in London where he is studying to be a doctor. He can get us a better rate. We can get twenty eight Lit at the bank, while he can get thirty-eight Lit. Our letters are now being censored, even registered letters. They write on the envelope that it has been checked and opened. It is better to send things through Nissan. Yankel Beare (Moshe Gershon's father) went to the Rabbi to ask him to write a letter to you. He is very poor and wants you to send money which his son had in South Africa. Rodel I know has very little, so I am not sure what she can do. We are not friendly with them here in Krakenowo and hardly see them.

What happened to Zusman Uzvolk? His sister Gitel is suffering from poverty. Her children are not well, especially the little one, who needs to move away to recuperate. Her husband Motel earns almost nothing and they have nothing to eat. Zusman seems to have forgotten his flesh and blood!

Thank you all again for the wonderful presents. I wish you all a happy and healthy new year. May all Jews be blessed for a good year ahead.

Regards to Avraham Yitzchak, Gitel, Heisel, Rivel and their daughter, Zundel, Maisha, Rodel and Bezalel, and Pnina.

Unfortunately time was not on our side and when Lithuania was invaded by Germany on 21 June 1941, the remaining Jews in the country were in mortal danger. The Lithuanians were keen to please the Germans and so took it upon themselves to do the Germans' work for them as well as take Jewish possessions as bounty. The Jews of Krakenowo were apparently taken to Ponevez where they were murdered in a mass killing.

IN PERMANENT MEMORY
OF THE ABOVEMENTIONED MARTYRS WHO WERE INHUMANLY
BROUGHT FROM KRAKINOWO TO PONEVEZ TO BE MURDERED
BY THE LITHUANIAN HULIGANS UNDER THE INSTRUCTIONS
OF THE CRUAL NAZI GERMAN MURDERERS ON SUNDAY AUGUST 17 1941
M.T.S.R.I.P.

Memorial plaque to the Kuznec family.

My sister's death and that of her little family has always caused me enormous grief. They have no marked grave and lie buried in a communal grave somewhere in Lithuania. The best I could do for them was to erect a memorial plaque at the Girls' Ponevez Yeshiva in Bnei Brak in Israel.

A remarkable series of dreams

On the 30 June 1941, I had a strange dream. I saw my sister Rivel, together with her husband and their children Beila and Hirshel, running! Suddenly I saw that one of Rivel's hands had disappeared. It seemed as if one of the children was no longer holding on to her. Soon after that I only saw three of them and then they were all out of sight.

On 25 August that same year, I had a second dream. Again I saw my sister Rivel. The third time I dreamed of her was on 8 February 1942.

When I returned to Krakenowo in 1992 I learnt that the rounding up and killing of the Krakenowo Jews had taken place on three separate occasions: the Jews were rounded up in mid-June 1941 the time of my first dream. A whole group was killed on 17 August 1941, while the remaining Jewish population was moved to Ponevez where they were all killed on 24 August 1941, the time of my second dream. I have not managed to connect up the relevance of my third dream.

How the Jews of Krakenowo died

For many years I asked myself the question: "How did the Jews in my *shtetl* Krakenowo die?" I have read extensively about the Holocaust as have many Jews, but for so long we never knew the precise details of what happened to our loved ones. We did hear, soon after the war, that my dear sister and her family

had been martyred, but we knew little of their tragic story. Over the years I have pieced together various versions of what occurred.

At the outbreak of the Russian-German War in 1941 the Jews tried to escape to Russia - remembering World War I when they found refuge there. In their hearts they knew what fate awaited those in Krakenowo at the hands of the Lithuanian Nationals who never disguised their hatred of the Jews. However, they only managed to reach Ponevez from where they were sent back by the Lithuanians. By the time they returned to their shtetl the Germans already occupied the place and the local Lithuanians were on the rampage.

In 1961, Motel Pogir phoned me from Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and gave me some details, these were later printed in the Krakenowo Jubilee Brochure.

> "On 22 June, 1941 the Germans occupied our *shtetl* Krakenowo. They immediately ordered the Lithuanian partisans and police to gather all the Jews into the shul. They were only allowed to take those possessions which were urgent necessities. A few hooligans, among them a man named Dambrowski, suggested that the Jewish leaders should be separated from the rest. This was carried out immediately. The most courageous Jews were selected. Among them were Mottel (Shlomo Zuses), Motke Varkel, Itzik (Efroims) Levin, Pinchos (Efroims) Levin, Abraham Friedman (*der Kameshen Shteppers*), Friedman, Samson Sher, Shaban and a few other young people. They were sent to the house of the priest on the hill where they were shot. They burnt them to ashes on a fire which had been lit with a torch."

When I was in Krakenowo in 1992, I met a Mr Lipshitz who undertook an investigation into the death of the residents of Krakenowo, on my behalf. According to him there were 527 Jewish people living in Krakenowo before the genocide. About 100 managed to escape and settle elsewhere. Some were even deported to Siberia by the Bolsheviks a week before the outbreak of the war. The murder of the Jews began at the beginning of July 1941. Hooligans picked out ten leaders and shot them indiscriminately not far from the Catholic Church at *Dam Galshas Palidar*, the priest's field on the mountain one-and-a-half kilometres from the Jewish area. (This substantiated Motel Pogir's story.) The murderers also attacked the Jewish women. They dragged them to the cellars where they raped and killed them. Many Jews were dragged from their homes and locked in the *bet hamidrash* where they were left without food or water and tortured without pity. The story is told that Smirel Levin approached a Lithuanian guard to let them out. When the guard refused, Levin pulled out a knife and stabbed the guard.

Mr Lipshitz told me that a second action of genocide killings took place on 17 August 1941. Approximately two hundred men, women and children were forced to dig their own grave one kilometre from the town on the edge of a small river called Zenepersa. They were then shot and their bodies thrown into the makeshift grave. The noise and echoes of the shots were heard from afar by those still in the village. The communal grave was so close to the river that at a later date, when floods occurred and the river flooded its banks, the bones of those murdered were washed away, dispersing the bodies far and wide. The Soviets later erected a memorial stone to mark the washed away grave, but no mention was made of the Jews that were killed, they were merely called Soviet citizens.

(A list of communal graves was published in section B of "The Great Massacre in Lithuania". One such grave was found near Krakenowo on the banks of the Zymprasha (Zenepersa) River, one kilometre from the *shtetl*, about four hundred metres from the main road between Krakenowo and Surviliskis, south of Krakenowo.)

The third and last action took place on 24 August 1941. An estimated 313 Jewish men, women and children were forced to drag their carts and wagons which were loaded with little ones as well as baggage. They were also forced to collect small rocks and stones and material to repair the road. Many died during this arduous walk of approximately 29 kilometres to an army barrack outside Ponevez, where the 4th Division of the Lithuanian army was situated. Jews had been gathered there from surrounding *shtetlach*. For a number of days they were tortured and humiliated. A short while later they were moved to a village called Payoste where they were shot and buried.

According to Chaia Levin Binder who now lives in Holon in Israel, there was one survivor of this slaughter, Shalom Grek, who was forty years old. He first found refuge with a local priest and then wandered from place to place. In the last two years of the war he found refuge with an old Polish farmer who lived on an isolated farm. After the return of the Soviets, he joined the police. Part of his job was to round up those who had collaborated with the Germans. He made it his life's ambition to take revenge for the murder of his fellow Jews. He once spoke about his ambition to a Lithuanian woman, who in turn reported him to anti-Russian forces. Shalom Grek was caught and tortured to death.

As far as I know, very little else has been written about the destruction of Krakenowo. Recently, however, a book appeared with the title "The

Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry"[4]. This is a translation of the 1951 Yiddish book "Churban Lita" by Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, whose brother Max lives in Johannesburg and is well known to me. In this most remarkable volume there are detailed eye witness reports about what happened in Ponevez. According to Rabbi Oshry, the city was captured by the Germans on 26 June, 1941. Many leading and learned personalities were selected and killed immediately, often in a most brutal manner with axes, knives and even wood-saws. The killings took place after severe torture. The rest of the Jews were herded into a ghetto which was mockingly named Palestinka. The ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by the Lithuanians, recruited by the "SS" guard. Many Jews, particularly those able to fight or work, were separated and guarded in the large and notorious Ponevez "Jailhouse for Criminals". Rivel's husband Velvel (Woolf) could very well have been among this group of able-bodied men.

On 22 August these men were forced to dance a *sheydimtantz* (devil dance) led by rabbis and the elders of the famous Kahaneman Yeshiva. Then came the shootings and the mass burials. Those who survived were deported to another ghetto. Many were driven to a cement factory and murdered there. While still alive, their bodies were thrown into the lime pits. Some of the victims were drowned in acid vats, enduring indescribable torment before dying. The hundreds of survivors who were left were eventually driven to Faiast, five kilometres out of town. In batches of two hundred they were ordered into tank traps and small hollows. They were shot by Lithuanians and buried by Russian prisoners of war. A gentile eye-witness later told the following story:

> "The Russian prisoners found a Jewish boy who was still alive in one of the graves. They managed to pull him out and to hide him. The Chief of the Lithuanian Police, however, discovered this and kept the boy locked up for some weeks before deciding to murder him."

Another eye-witness testified that hundreds of Jews from *shtetls* around Ponevez, such as Remigole, Rogeve, Krakenowo, Shadove and others, were driven to Ponevez at another time and suffered a similar fate to the other Jews. A Ponevez physician survived the slaughter for some months and left a record of many horrifying events that ended the history of a city which had been one of the greatest centres of Torah in Europe.

I can only assume that Krakenowo Jews may have been among these victims which Rabbi Oshry describes.

[4] The Annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry, Rabbi Ephraim Oshry

Rivel's 'Yohrtzeit'

It is possible that my sister Rivel was separated from her husband and children during this period and that they each died on different dates and in various places. That is why Morris and I have no definite *yohrtzeit* date for them. At one stage I kept 25 Elul as her Hebrew date of death. This is the day following the *yohrtzeit* for my late mother. On the other hand, in that terrible year of 1941, Tisha B'Av, our eternal day of tragedies, fell on 3 September and it is possible that the *yohrtzeit* for my dear ones should be observed together with that infamous date for the whole of *Klal Yisrael*. However, since Mr Lipshitz's research findings, I now believe my sister was murdered on 17 August 1941, corresponding to 24 Av 5701. Since my birthday is also on 17 August, I am painfully aware of my sister's fate each year. May *Hashem* avenge the death of all our martyrs and may He judge to eternal damnation the many Germans and Lithuanians who murdered them!

The Jews of Keidan

I have always felt close to Keidan as I spent part of my youth at school there. Keidan was very near Krakenowo, a mere thirty kilometres away. The Germans entered Keidan on 25 June 1941, three days into Operation Barbarossa. Within a week a ghetto was organised to concentrate all the Jews of the district in one small area. The first victims to be murdered were the Keidaner Rabbi Shlomo Feinsilber as well as the *dayanim* (elders). On 15 August every man, woman and child was driven out of Keidan to a very large farmhouse on the outskirts of the town. Jews who lived in adjacent villages were also forced

to join in the march. For thirteen days they were imprisoned in the barn; all they had was the food they took with them. Some were beaten and tortured and gave up their lives in horrendous grief and pain. Others were just whipped, but eventually all were shot and buried in mass graves. Only one Jew survived, and it is from him that Rabbi Oshry was able to get this information. Chaim Rander miraculously escaped, joined the partisans and subsequently returned to Keidan. He was the sole survivor out of a total of thirty-seven thousand Jews!

A survivor's sad memories

The following report was given to me by Ida Pogir. She was a Krakenowo survivor who eventually settled in Bulawayo, now known as Zimbabwe. The original was in Yiddish (Jubilee Brochure, 1961) which has been translated.

> We managed to live in the Kovno Ghetto for five terrible years. Our daily companions were suffering, pain, famine and terror. We struggled every day, every hour, every minute. It was a struggle between life and death.
>
> For the last hundred days of the war, my husband and I hid in a bunker which we had dug under the floor-boards of our farmhouse home. It was dark in the bunker and a small crack provided the only glimmer of light from the sun. The hole in which we were concealed was so tiny that we could not lie down. We were compelled to remain in a sitting position by day and by night.
>
> Then the day came when the peasant woman who had helped to hide us announced our freedom. Once again we could walk in the sunshine. Our guardian angel had risked her life in order to save us. She stretched her hand into the hole, our hiding place, with great compassion and love. With tears in her eyes she shouted:"You are free. You are free!"
>
> A longing to return to Krakenowo came over us; a *shtetl* so precious to us. It was the place where we had spent our youthful years. We longed for our friends Chana Yebush,

Chaya and Avraham Zelikowitz, Zviya Levitt, Hirsh Rabinowitz, Chatzke Chait, my own brother Hirshke Levin and Feige Pogir (my husband's sister), Israel Binder and Shilke Levin (my sister).

These and others, we found out later, had died in the Holocaust. One day a brave young man turned up. It was Shmuel. By good fortune and his own courage, he had survived. He had fought in all the Russian campaigns and at the end of the war had found himself totally alone. He told us that while he was at the German front he had sworn an oath to return to Krakenowo in order to avenge the horrors that had overtaken us. Shmuel set to work. He went around to the Christian families who had hidden and given shelter to Jewish children. He found these little ones and handed them over to the Jewish *kehilla*. He also collected funds to set up a very large *matzeva*(tombstone) in Ponevez to commemorate all those victims of Krakenowo who died in the ghetto in that town. He was quite fearless and worked in this manner until the Lithuanian partisans caught him unawares and murdered him. It was this young man who escorted us to Krakenowo and stood guard over us.

When we entered Krakenowo we went straight to the marketplace. The market square with its adjacent houses was completely overgrown and geese and cows grazed in the area. The shutters of all the houses were half-closed. I had the impression that the peasants who now occupied our homes were afraid to look up at the sun. We visited the once clean Neviazhe River where the young people of Krakenowo had spent such wonderful summer days. It was neglected and its banks were overgrown with wild flowers and thorns.

It was on a Sunday that we came back to our *shtetl*. Suddenly we heard the church bells ring out their old tunes. Our legs trembled and our throats were filled with bitterness and pain. Our heads were bowed. Then a strong emotion surged through my body. I choked back the tears and lifted my head. With the last of the strength I had within me I managed to walk towards the church. I stood there waiting for the Gentiles to emerge. I wanted to show them that not all the Jews had been annihilated – that some had survived. When they came out and saw me many turned away in shame. Some, however, came up and fell on their knees. They crossed themselves piously and wept. They could not believe their eyes, that all the Krakenowo Jews had not been killed and had indeed returned.

A feeling of sadness and dread came over me. I struggled to get into the car where Shmuel was waiting. I begged him to get me away from this *shtetl* as fast as he could. The place where we had spent our wonderful youth existed no longer.

My return to Krakenowo in 1992

The pain in my heart regarding the loss of my sister and loved ones I had left behind in Krakenowo has never abated. After reading Ida Pogir's letter, I did not want to ever return to the town of my birth, but as I have said before, life does not always work out the way we plan. In 1992, Mendel Kaplan organised a tour to Lithuania to show members of his family their roots. Mendel, at that time was the Chairman of the executive of the Jewish Agency and, as a result, had many contacts in Lithuania. His mother had been born in Krakenowo and so he approached Morris and me to join this family group and explain first hand what Krakenowo was like. Four members of our family went with Mendel. Morris and his wife Dora, their daughter Joyce and myself.

Memorial stone in Krakenowo cemetry – 1992.

I wasn't quite sure what to expect. What I do know is that I was excited but reticent at the same time. We were not quite sure how much time we would have in Krakenowo as a Friday was scheduled for the Krakenowo leg of the tour, and we still had to get to Ponevez and then to Riga. My niece Joyce kept a diary of our travels written in poetry form. The following are extracts from that diary:

"Two men travelling along a road
So excited it really showed.
Morris insisted he was travelling for me
But every minute of the journey filled him with glee.

Krakenowo cemetry in 1992. Morris, Mendel, Sydney, Mr Lipshitz and Dora.

Sydney organised every minute of the day
A time trip for sure, we must have no delay.

The voices they call me, the people they shout
What was the war and trouble about?
My soul reaches out and tries to discover
A world that has gone, never to recover.
I see the birch trees in the wald all round
They cried at the time, but now – not a sound.

My emotions are floating, looking for a place to land,
I see my roots – but all on shifting sand.
Why was I chosen above all of you
To travel with Morris and Dora and Sydney too?
When I get home will I find peace of mind?
Will I finally have left unfinished business behind?

Friday 12, an ordinary day,
But my head is pounding, it won't go away.
The ghosts are all calling, come visit they say.
I'm travelling their road on the paths which they talked,
At the trees I will gaze, across their bridge I will walk.
What I'll see I don't know, only in my heart I can feel,
It all seems so strange, quite unreal.
As we near the territory of my people.

A few hours have passed – I could not write before.
I went to Krakenowo a place I adore.
Krakenowo is a place from where my roots start
Every street, every stone has my heritage in part.
The place may have changed and lost its charm
But the family memories can come to no harm.

The shul still stands there on its little hill
Thick walls of stone cannot break at will.
A few houses we saw, Lazar, Levin and co
Our family place – I really don't know.
But we found the well, a bit modern today
And the house was definitely across the way.
The bridge, the Neviazhe it's all there not a ploy
There are some things the *shkotzim* cannot destroy.

Dad was so excited he ran all the way
Pointing and talking, he had so much to say.
Uncle Syd found each person "listen what he says"
But no one knew Ze'ev Zivas or family Kuznec.
The cemetery is a mess, a few stones here and there,
But the *nefesh* of people buried don't care
'Cos they travelled with us to all new lands.
The future of our people is in our own hands.

So how do I feel? Emotionally spent –
Memories and stories wherever we went.
I feel so clean right to my soul

A circle completed. I've achieved my goal.
Not one bit disappointed, I've seen through their eyes.
I've answered their questions, I've got no more whys.
I've walked with my Dad, just as if I knew,
He had painted the place, and I knew what to do.
My Dad is a realist, he's real to the bone,
I hoped its rubbed off on that part that I own.
I love him so much I can sometimes cry
To be like him is how I try.
Hashem brought the sun and it shone on our town
'Cos the rest of the day the light was down.
I really have been privileged to see such a sight
When I get home about it I'll write;
But I will remember, I'll never forget
Erev Shabbat 12 June – on that you can bet."

Horse and cart was still the mode of transport for many Lithuanians in 1992.

With a local peasant woman in Lithuania in 1992.

Joyce writes about my search for news of my family. When we were in Shavel I met a man by the name of Mr Lipshitz. He lived in Lithuania and said he would help me. I was trying to establish if my sister and her family had indeed gone to their deaths. I had to make sure that, if by some miracle they had escaped, somebody may have known about it. If they had died, I wondered if anyone knew the exact details of what had happened to them. Mr Lipshitz was very helpful. He ran advertisements in the various local newspapers asking for information. He included a photograph and their details. Unfortunately it all came to nought. Somewhere in that far land is the burial area of those I love. May G-d rest their souls.

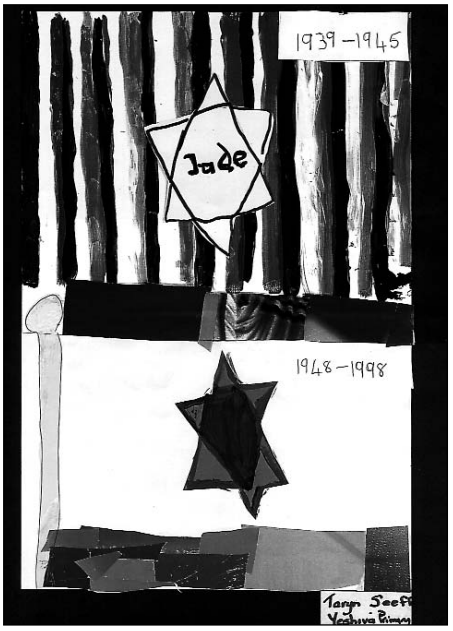
Dora, Sydney and Morris standing on a bridge crossing the Neviazhe – 1992

PORTAL FIVE

part 2

Into the light

From darkness into the light



Taryn's picture – *From darkness into the light*.

We cannot explain why *Hashem* hid His face and allowed six million Jews to be butchered, tortured, gassed and cremated. The wisest of us cannot comprehend how one of the most supposedly cultured nations permitted this atrocity. Yet a few short years after the end of World War II a miracle occurred which changed the history of the Jewish people. After 2000 years Jews once again had a sovereign state. The miracle, of course, was the establishment of the State of Israel.

My granddaughter Taryn's Grade 3 class at Yeshiva College did a project to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut. The children were asked to draw a picture showing 'From darkness into the light.' The idea intrigued me and I was very interested to see the results. On the one half of the page Taryn drew a yellow star superimposed on the pajamas worn by the Jews in concentration camps, the other half of the page showed a blue and white Magen David representing 50 years of the State of Israel.

This section of the book was prompted by my granddaughter's picture.

Return to Zion

Earlier in this volume I mentioned my family's involvement with the Zionist movements. We all felt very strongly about Theodor Herzl's ideology and dream to have our own homeland again. The Zionist Congress started the ball rolling, but other events in the twentieth century also affected the Jewish cause.

On 2 November 1917, soon after my eighth birthday, the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration in which it agreed to the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. They gave their undertaking to facilitate the achievement of this goal. The implication of this document made it quite clear that the Zionist movement was accorded international recognition. It appeared as if Herzl's dream was to become a reality.

The British General, Lord Allenby, marched into Jerusalem on 9 December after defeating the ruling Turks. The League of Nations then granted the United Kingdom a mandate to rule Palestine. At the same time Trans-Jordan was declared an Arab Kingdom under King Abdullah. However, it was to be many years before an independent Jewish state was declared.

The Jewish people under the banner of the Zionist movement began to mould their own destiny. Groups from various countries began to make *aliyah* to Palestine. They came from Yemen, Central and Eastern Europe among other places. They began to work the land which they bought from local Arabs. Initially the British had no difficulty with the situation. However, when the number of Jewish immigrants began to increase, the British became worried about the fate of the residing Arabs. They did not want to antagonise the Arab states as they were reliant on them for oil. In order to curb Jewish immigration into Palestine, the British imposed restraints on Jewish refugees.

The Zionist workers responded by organising "illegal immigration" into Palestine. Some boat loads managed to get through the British patrols and landed immigrants in Haifa. Many, however, were stopped and the refugees were sent to detention camps, both inside Palestine as well as in Cyprus. Enormous pain and suffering resulted from this British policy. I remember the photographs that were distributed at the time. My heart broke for these poor people. My pain was further deepened by the memory of my own dear sister Rivel and her family who did not reach the land of their dreams because of political bureaucracy.

Declaration of the State of Israel

During the time that "illegal immigration" was being practiced in Palestine, the politicians were working on having an independent State of Israel declared. They finally succeeded and on 5 May 1948 the United Nations passed a resolution to that effect. We could not believe the announcement when we heard it on the radio. I could not believe that I was living at a time when the Jewish people once more had their own sovereign state. Jews throughout the world were thrilled with the news and rallies of support were held in many countries. The leaders of the new country were much more cautious. They understood the difficult times that still lay ahead. Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and his Cabinet made plans for war. The Jewish struggle for survival was still to continue.

Declaration of the State of Israel – 5 May 1948.

Each time war has broken out in Israel I have felt devastated. I have read every article in the local South African newspapers as well as those in the Jewish press. During the 1948 War of Independence I prayed that the fledgling country with its rudimentary army would be able to withstand the force of seven surrounding Arab states. My prayers, and those of thousands of other Jews, were answered, but at a price. There was a great loss of Jewish life and the Holy City of Jerusalem was not under Jewish control – we were forced to look wistfully from afar at our Kotel, the last remaining wall of the Temple.

I was deeply distressed during the Sinai Campaign in 1956. The force of

Nasser's soldiers seemed set to destroy everything the Israelis had built. The Six Day War in June 1967 was an amazing period. Jews in the Diaspora were immensely proud of the Israeli armed forces. In the first few hours they had performed the most incredible feats. However, the struggle on the Golan Heights resulted in many Jewish lives being lost. When the Israeli soldiers broke through the Lion Gate and entered the Old City of Jerusalem, I sat glued to the radio listening to the news. A miracle had occurred! The Holy City would no longer be a divided city. The Israeli Government promised the world to keep this very special city free for use by all the great religions. Unfortunately, the regaining of Jerusalem incurred the death of many Jewish soldiers.

The Reunification of Jerusalem – 1967.
FROM LEFT: Chief of staff –
General Yitzchak Rabin, Minister of defence –
Moshe Dayan, Commander of the central
region – General Uzi Narkis entering the Old
City via the Lion Gate.

Naomi and I first visited Israel in 1965 when we travelled the length and breadth of the land. I was enthralled! I rejoiced to see its deserts becoming flowering gardens and the growth of the towns and cities. We looked with sadness at the Old City of Jerusalem – we were so near and yet so far from our holiest site.

Each subsequent visit reinforced my intense pride in the Jewish Nation and I visited Israel frequently during the next few years. I read extensively about the country and its peoples. I have always felt very connected to the country and its highs were my highs and its lows, my lows. However, I was totally unprepared for the electrifying news which swept through the Sydenham-Highlands North Shul on Yom Kippur in 1973. My blood froze when I heard that Israel had been

attacked on the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. I prayed with even greater fervour than I had done the whole day. I could not wait until the fast ended so I could listen to the latest events in the Middle East. Miraculously, the country survived this crisis, but again it was at a great cost to young Israeli lives.

To this day Arab hostility has not abated and a peace settlement is still to be negotiated. Yet I feel very positive about the young State. In 1991 when the country was threatened by terrible scuds from Iraq, I felt drawn to the country. Soon after the 15 January deadline, I flew to Israel. I wanted to be part of the country's suffering. I was issued with a gas mask and sat in the specially sealed off room in the hotel where I was staying. My family thought I was looking for trouble, but I had no fear at all as I felt that the Almighty was orchestrating the whole series of events. I felt safe at all times and was not surprised to hear that the 39 scuds that fell did not directly cause any loss of life.

I continue to visit Eretz Yisrael every year and follow all news events. I hope that peace will come to our land and that there will be no more bloodshed. We have lost a statesman, Yitzhak Rabin, generals and soldiers in combat, and innocent civilians in senseless bomb attacks. Enough is enough. May a peaceful solution be found soon to the problems in the Middle East.

This past year I went to participate in the country's 50th Jubilee celebrations. Over the years I have watched military parades, air displays, as well as naval manoeuvres, and each time I have felt intensely proud of "our" soldiers. I have also had business ventures in the country, as I wanted to feel like a participant in Israeli life.

Jerusalem April 1998
FROM LEFT: Joyce Levin, Dora Seeff, Fanny Kampel, Naomi, Sydney, Neville Levin.

Naomi and I watching the air display in Tel Aviv – part of Israel's 50th Anniversary.

Welcoming new immigrants from Tashkent on Yom Ha'atzmaut 1998 – the jubilee year. FROM LEFT: Sarah Rabinowitz, Naomi, Sydney, Dora, Fanny Kampel, Mitzi Pollack.

PORTAL SIX

In honour of beloved souls

Our family is re-united in 1935

The family re-united in South Africa – 1935.
Nina, Harry, Sholem Ze'ev, Sydney, Chana Sora, Morris.

As I stated in the introduction to this volume, this book is written in honour of the seven souls who were closest to me and have now passed on. With the exception of Rivel, we were all blessed to come to South Africa and re-establish the close family bond we had in Lithuania. Abe and Harry had become successful in their business endeavours. Morris and I were likewise doing well in our work. The four brothers who were already in South Africa therefore had the means to bring out our family from Krakenowo and to support them satisfactorily. We arranged for all documentation required by the authorities and, in February 1935, our family was reunited: my father and mother, Rodel, little Charlie and Nina, who was the youngest. Abe and I went to Cape Town to meet the ship. Rodel and Charlie stayed in Cape Town with her husband, Gershon, who had arrived earlier, and the rest of us travelled by train to Johannesburg. We had organised a rented house for them at 6 Raleigh Street, Yeoville, which is where we took the family on our arrival in Johannesburg.

My parents

My father, Sholem Ze'ev was born in Krakenowo on Friday 28 January 1870. When he emigrated to South Africa he was sixty-five years old and still very energetic and eager to explore this new land. On his arrival, he became known affectionately as Velvel, and Woolf in English. My mother, Chana Sora was born in Datnova, which is close to Keidan, on 8 August 1870. She too was sixty five years old when she arrived. Even though they had a hard existence in Lithuania and Russia, they still had plenty of enthusiasm for life.

A year or so after the family's arrival, we managed to secure a permanent house at 22 Hunter Street, Yeoville. Morris, Harry and I went to stay with the rest of the family and it was wonderful to be united once again. We had all left Krakenowo as children, and now as adults we re-established our close ties. Being young, we had very busy social lives. It was always a problem to

My parents – Sholem Ze'ev and Chana Sora.

Chana Sora, Sholem Ze'ev and children.
(Rivel was added later by means of computer-technology)
BACK ROW (from left): Rivel, Gertie, Abe, Rodel, Sydney, Nina
FRONT ROW: Morris, Sholem Ze'ev, Charlie, Chana Sora, Harry.

ascertain whether or not everyone was at home at night. Instead of checking each bedroom, we devised a method whereby a bottle would be placed at the front door and, depending on its position, we knew who was already home.

Our parents were thrilled to be with us in South Africa, although they did pine for Rivel and her family. We have many family sayings that originated with my parents. When my father had heartburn he would say "*Chana Sora doh*". Heartburn and that expression have now become synonymous. Any time there was a hullabaloo anywhere, my mother would say "*Shrying vi a tzoitskes*" which related to a gentile woman in Krakenowo who used to scream and make a big noise!

My father had a very full and busy life when he came to this country. He continued to study Torah when he could and would regularly go to *shul* to study *Ein Yaacov*, which included stories and teachings from the Talmud. He was a regular congregant in *shul* and every Shabbat morning after services, he would come home and my mother would serve a *kiddush* for him and the rest of the family. She used to make the most delicious *gefilte* fish, which my father relished.

My father was very proud of his sons' accomplishments in South Africa. He loved to visit Abe and Harry's shops and always showed great interest in Morris' and my achievements at the factory and would come with us on Sundays to proudly inspect new developments. My father was a very methodical man who was particular about writing up the income and expenditure of his household. He would sit at the dining room table on a regular basis and sort out the family finances.

My parents spent a lot of quality time together. I remember them learning *Tzena U-rena*, which means "go out and see" anecdotal stories about Jewish history. My mother would read the text and my father would listen and then they would discuss it. My mother loved to potter around in the kitchen while my father sat and did his work. We had a chicken on the property and she would tend it and collect the freshly laid eggs. She enjoyed socialising and would often go visiting *landsleit.* Her greatest delight, however, was having her children and grandchildren around her. Our home was always filled with family which gave my mother endless joy.

We spent much time together as a family both on weekends and holidays, often going out for the day on Sundays. We tried out most of the local picnic

Celebrating – 1943
FROM LEFT: Sydney, Rodel, Charlie, Chana Sora, Beni, Nina, Sholem Ze'ev, Dora, Morris.

sites in and around Johannesburg. When the grandchildren came along, they were also included in these outings and I can clearly remember how carsick Ruth (Morris and Dora's daughter) became if she sat in the back of the car!

On one occasion, we decided to go to a park in Kensington. While driving there, we noticed that our dog, Spotty, was following us. We stopped and picked him up and took him with us. When we arrived, he somehow got lost. For three days there was no sign of him. Finally, on the fourth day he returned, looking very tired and hungry. He lay down and slept for twenty-four hours, after which he was back to his old self.

Sometimes we would go away for a full weekend to places further afield such as Parys on the Vaal River, where we would stay at the local kosher hotel. My parents loved Warmbaths, especially in winter, as the waters were warm but invigorating.

Then, of course, there were the longer holidays. We went to Durban and stayed at the kosher Menorah Hotel which was owned by Sol Kerzner's father.

Family photo – 1950
BACK ROW (from left): Morris, Abe, Rodel, Nina, Sydney, Harry
FRONT ROW: Dora, Gertie, Beni, Naomi, Rita.

My parents always enjoyed Muizenberg in February and would stay at a boarding house opposite the Balmoral Hotel. The owner was a charming woman who took great care of my parents and whoever was with them.

In general we were all thrilled at being able to spend such wonderful quality time together in our new country.

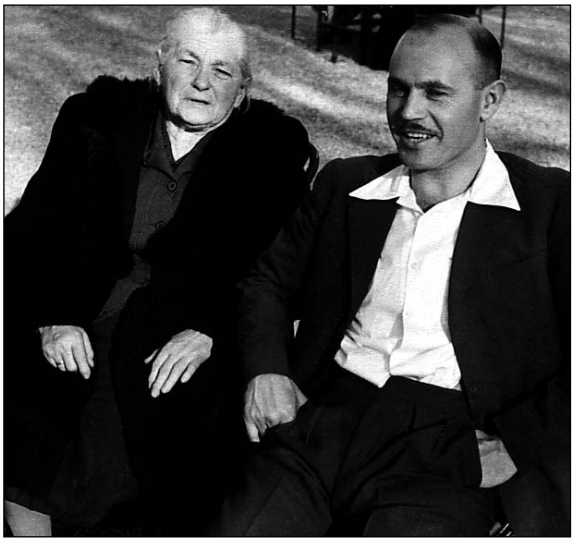
My parents on holiday in Muizenberg.

The passing of my father

My father regularly attended the daily services at the Berea Shul. In 1947, as Rosh Hashana was approaching, he wanted to attend *Slichot* early one morning and ran to catch the tram on time. He must have tired himself out in the process because, when he returned home, he did not feel well. His condition worsened and within a few days he developed pneumonia. Despite medical attention, he grew worse. At 3pm in the afternoon before Erev Yom Kippur on 23 September 1947, corresponding to 9 Tishrei 5708, he passed away. His funeral was therefore held after the fast.

He was dearly missed by us all and we deeply mourned his passing.

My mother



My mother and I.

I recall my mother being a very wise woman who had many practical proverbs and *maises* (anecdotes) of great wisdom which I still remember with vivid clarity. She believed that a person's nature is built up from habits which are regularly repeated. She often said "A housewife must work with her brains. In Yiddish the expression is: *A balabosta darf arbeten mit seichel*. I have applied this saying to my own business: A manager must work with wisdom and know how to delegate duties to employees. My mother also had a lovely sense of humour and, of course, had a repertoire of stories: It is better to lose with a wise man than to win with a fool: Rather settle a claim out of court as this will cost less money, cause less stress, prevent anxiety and ill-health. Another favourite of hers can best be introduced by this Yiddish saying: *A rov an am ha-oretz, an orimer poretz a poyerse choretz iz noch nisht gliech oizgehalten*. The literal English translation is "An unintelligent rabbi, a poor *poritz* (count) and a peasant who thinks he is clever." This may be explained in this way: irrespective of how little a rabbi knows he is still a scholar with more knowledge than you, a nobleman who is poor still possesses more than ordinary folk, and a peasant, no matter how well he does, is still only a peasant.

She had many other sayings which obviously cannot all be included here. However, I have found that throughout my life, her little *maises* have been very helpful to me and I have passed them onto my family on numerous occasions.

My mother was a real *balabosta.* She was always busy preparing for her

family and the many guests who came to our home. She settled down very easily in her new lifestyle and was soon visiting all her *landsleit* and family. My mother never forgot the problems of others and spent much of her time collecting contributions for the Krakenowo Sick Benefit Society. She got on very well with her *machutonim,* especially Mr Goldberg, Gertie's father, and they would spend many long hours in conversation. My mother was always keen to know what was happening elsewhere in the Jewish world and enjoyed reading the American Jewish papers to glean what she could from them.

After my father died my mother became less active and more frail. However, she had a very strong character spiced with a good sense of humour. When she got ill, she would quip in Yiddish "*Velvel ken varten far mir*."– "Velel (her pet name for my father) can wait for me! " As I said before, my mother joined us on our many family outings but unfortunately, during the car journey on one of our numerous picnics, she felt particularly uncomfortable. Her health began to deteriorate and she had difficulty breathing. She suffered for a further six months before she passed away. She died on Wednesday evening 6 September 1950, corresponding to 24 Elul 5710, with her children at her bedside. She was finally at peace and we were all deeply saddened by the passing of this wonderful woman.

Chana Sora and her children.
BACK ROW (from left): Harry, Sydney, Chana Sora, Abe
FRONT ROW: Morris, Nina.

Dedicating a room at Sandringham Gardens in memory of our parents – 1961.
BACK ROW (from left): Rodel, Abe, Gertie, Naomi, Sydney, Dora, Morris
FRONT ROW: Norman Gordon, Stanley, Bernard.

My Brother Abe

My eldest brother, Avraham Yitzchak (Abe) was born on 25 January, 1895. He was named Avrom after my maternal grandmother's father Avrom and Yitzchak after my maternal grandfather's father.

Abe was a healthy young lad and a keen learner. He could read and write in Yiddish and started learning *Chumash* at the age of seven. He then began learning *Tanach* and ultimately learned *Gemorrah* at the Krakenowo Yeshiva. He read the *maftir* at his barmitzvah. Our parents made a *simcha* for him and invited all his friends including Zelig Isaac Levin's sons, Louis and Barney.

At that stage the Levin family were planning to emigrate to South Africa. My parents asked if they would allow Abe to travel with them as he was only fourteen years old. They agreed.

On his arrival in Johannesburg, Abe approached Louis Seeff, our father's brother who had come to South Africa a number of years earlier with his wife Freidel (nee Brenner) and one daughter Rae. Having no formal training or skills, Abe asked if Louis could give him a job. Louis obliged and also provided him with accommodation. Abe soon learned the grocery trade and worked for Louis for about nine or ten years.

Our uncle was very happy with the arrangement as he needed responsible help in his grocery shop. His wife was very busy looking after her young expanding family. Once they settled in South Africa they had another five children, including two sets of twins. After Rae came the first set of twins, Harry and Issy. A year later a second set of twins arrived. They were named Samuel and Ann. The last child to be born was Joseph or Joey. Freidel worked very hard to raise her large family.

Abe eventually saved up two hundred pounds and felt ready to go into business on his own. He knew a family who had a drapery shop, specialising in ladies' hats. The proprietor of the shop wanted to move to another part of the country and was looking to sell the business. He was asking a very reasonable amount and was even prepared to train Abe in the business until he felt confident to continue on his own. In those days, most ladies wore hats and Abe felt the proposition was beneficial. In a very short space of time, Abe mastered the

business and successfully traded in his shop "Well Wear Drapers" at 49 Harrison Street, Johannesburg. Abe made a great success of the business and had to move to larger premises. He was doing so well that Uncle Louis at one time even came to get a loan from him!

When our family returned to Lithuania from Russia in 1922, it became evident that Harry should join Abe in South Africa. Abe, by this time, was earning a good living and was able to send money for Harry's ticket by sea. When Harry arrived in South Africa, Abe took him to his lodgings. Harry worked for Uncle Louis for a short while after which Abe took him into his business in Harrison Street. Harry was a quick learner and the brothers continued trading with even greater success. Some time later, Abe opened a second shop in Jeppe Street, but this store was not as successful as the original. He eventually sold it to Greatermans.

Abe gets married

Gertie and Abe – A year after they were married.

As a consequence of Harry's devoted assistance, Abe felt that the time had arrived for him to find a suitable wife and settle down. In 1924 he was introduced to a young lady, Gertie Goldberg. Her father Henry Goldberg had a prosperous furniture business in Central Johannesburg. In those days, a family of good repute who were also financially secure was a big attraction to a young man. Abe

agreed to the match and after a while they became engaged. In 1925 he and Gertie were married at the Lions' Shul in Doornfontein. The reception was held in the Ginsberg Hall. Harry, of course, was the best man.

Gertie was the younger of two daughters; the elder, Sarah, had married Harry Zinn a few years previously. Gertie's parents owned a large house at 123 Sivewright Avenue in Doornfontein, which was then a predominantly Jewish area. With both daughters married, the house was too large for just two people, so Abe and Gertie moved in with Gertie's parents.

In 1930 Gertie decided to visit her husband's family in Krakenowo. You can well imagine the joy and happiness with which my parents welcomed their South African daughter-in-law.

Gertie on a visit to Krakenowo – 1930.
BACK (from left): Nina, Rivel, Gertie, Rodel FRONT: Chana Sora, Charlie, Sholem Ze'ev

Mr Goldberg soon realised that his new son-in-law was a capable businessman. He offered him a partnership in his furniture shop "H Goldberg and Company". Abe felt that this was a good business opportunity and accepted the offer. Harry subsequently took over Abe's drapery shop, and paid for the stock

Gertie and Abe in Durban – 1953

over a period of two years. In the years that followed, Abe increased the turnover of "H Goldberg and Company" substantially. He finally took over the whole business and changed the name to "Elwood Furnishers". He moved to premises in Bree Street, opposite the old Metro Theatre.

Unfortunately, no children were born of this marriage. According to Jewish law a man is entitled to divorce his wife if no children are born after ten years of marriage. Abe refused to take this option as it would have hurt Gertie's feelings as well as those of his in-laws.

Abe was a charitable man

My brother was an observant Jew, concerned about his co-religionists and very interested in Jewish education. As I have mentioned earlier, our cousin Chaim Velva Seeff was instrumental in starting the Yeshiva College in Johannesburg. Abe decided to participate in the building of the school and donated money to build the pre-grade building which was subsequently named after him.

ר׳ אברהם יצחק בר׳
שלום זאב זיב עה׳
מיסד האגודה לקידום מחקר
והדור את צדק מצות מוסר
בעם ובעולם
האמין שכל הלומד, ומלמד
ושומר ועושה זוכה גם לשכר
וגם למנוחת הנפש
THE MENORA NURSERY SCHOOL
HAS BEEN ENDOWED IN THE
MEMORY OF
ABRAHAM ISCAAC SEEFF
FOUNDER AND EXPONENT OF THE SOCIETY
FOR THE PROMOTION OF JEWISH JUSTICE,
ETHICS AND MORALS.
HE BELIEVED THAT ONE WHO LEARNS
TEACHES,OBSERVES AND PRACTICES
NOT ONLY RECEIVES THE PROMISED
REWARDS BUT ALSO FINDS PEACE
AND CONTENTMENT IN THIS WORLD
AS WELL.

Memorial stone at Menora Nursery School, Johannesburg

In later years when *meshulochim* from Israel came to visit him, he never turned anyone away. He left sixty-two percent of his estate to charities and Torah institutions in Israel. The rest went to local charities. He was very proud to be a Jew and felt that we should be a true light to the nations in our actions and behaviour. Abe felt that many people placed too much emphasis on Jewish ritual, rather than following the Torah teaching of ethics and morals. To this end he set up a trust fund in 1972 called "The Society for Justice, Ethics and Morals". Its sole purpose was the development of young Jewish minds along a just and honest pathway. One of Abe's objectives was to train people to minimise stress and similar bad habits. He aimed at helping people to be healthy, successful and happy. This fund has supported research done by Rivka Katz and others in both Israel and South Africa and continues to this day.

During 1974 my brother became ill. His wife Gertie was also ill at the time and she was hospitalised. Abe came to stay with Naomi and me for some six weeks. On the last night of Pesach he went to bed, fell asleep, never to awaken.

He was a great lover of Israel and believed with all his heart in the philosophies of Zionism. On a recent trip to Israel, 24 years after Abe's passing, I arranged to move his earthly remains from West Park Cemetery in Johannesburg, to re-bury him in the Eretz ha-Chaim Cemetery on the road to Bet Shemesh, in his beloved Israel. May his dear soul rest in peace.

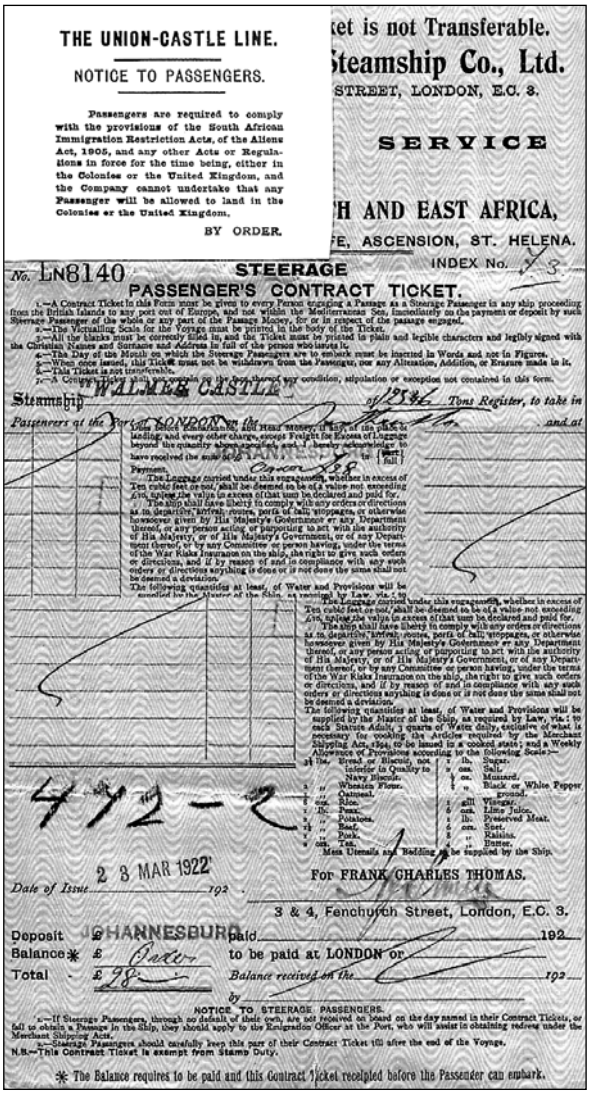
Abe Seeff is laid to rest in Israel – 1998.

Harry is a success

My brother Heisel (Harry) was born on 18 September 1898, corresponding to the second day of Rosh Hashana. He was an excellent student; after mastering *Chumash* and *Tanach* he began *Talmud* studies with local rabbis. At

the age of fifteen he could learn *far zich* (by himself) which was a great achievement. As a young boy I remember him studying by the light of a small candle until well after midnight. He ruined his eyes in the process and in later years needed to wear glasses for short-sightedness. My brother was always interested in the world around him and before the outbreak of World War I took up secular studies as well as continuing with his Hebrew work. He was always a great Zionist and participated in youth movements.

Harry arrived in South Africa in 1922. He was met by Abe who gave him board and lodging. Initially he worked for our Uncle Louis in the grocery shop in Johannesburg. A short while later he joined Abe in his drapery shop. It did not take him long to learn the ropes of the retail business. He had a friendly and open personality and was happy and keen to try innovative ideas.



THE UNION-CASTLE LINE.

NOTICE TO PASSENGERS.

Passengers are required to comply with the provisions of the South African Immigration Restriction Acts, of the Aliens Act, 1905, and any other Acts or Regulations in force for the time being, either in the Colonies or the United Kingdom, and the Company cannot undertake that any Passenger will be allowed to land in the Colonies or the United Kingdom.

BY ORDER.

...et is not Transferable.

...Steamship Co., Ltd.

...STREET, LONDON, E.C. 3.

SERVICE

...H AND EAST AFRICA,

...E, ASCENSION, ST. HELENA.

INDEX No. 43

No. LN8140 STEERAGE

PASSENGER'S CONTRACT TICKET.

1.—A Contract Ticket in this Form must be given to every Person engaging a Passage as a Steerage Passenger in any ship proceeding from the British Islands to any port out of Europe, and not within the Mediterranean Sea, immediately on the payment or deposit by such Steerage Passenger of the whole or any part of the Passage Money, for or in respect of the passage engaged.

2.—The Victualling Scale for the Voyage must be printed in the body of the Ticket.

3.—All the blanks must be correctly filled in, and the Ticket must be printed in plain and legible characters and legibly signed with the Christian Names and Surname and Address in full of the person who issues it.

4.—The Day of the Month on which the Steerage Passengers are to embark must be inserted in Words and not in Figures.

5.—When once issued, this Ticket must not be withdrawn from the Passenger, nor any Alteration, Addition, or Erasure made in it.

6.—This Ticket is not transferable.

7.—A Copy of the Regulations for the time thereof any condition, stipulation or exception not contained in this form.

Steamship WALMER CASTLE of 13,446 Tons Register, to take in Passengers at the Port of LONDON on the ... and at ...

...ading, and every other charge, except Freight for Excess of Luggage beyond the quantity above specified, and I hereby acknowledge to have received the sum of £ ... (part / full) Payment.

Cancel 28

The Luggage carried under this engagement, whether in excess of Ten cubic feet or not, shall be deemed to be of a value not exceeding £10, unless the value in excess of that sum be declared and paid for.

The ship shall have liberty to comply with any orders or directions as to departure, arrival, routes, ports of call, stoppages, or otherwise howsoever given by His Majesty's Government or any Department thereof, or any person acting or purporting to act with the authority of His Majesty, or of His Majesty's Government, or of any Department thereof, or by any Committee or person having, under the terms of the War Risks Insurance on the ship, the right to give such orders or directions, and if by reason of and in compliance with any such orders or directions anything is done or is not done the same shall not be deemed a deviation.

The following quantities at least, of Water and Provisions will be supplied by the Master of the Ship, as required by Law, viz.:—to each Statute Adult, 3 quarts of Water daily, exclusive of what is necessary for cooking the Articles required by the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894, to be issued in a cooked state; and a Weekly Allowance of Provisions according to the following Scale:—

3 lbs.	Bread or Biscuit, not inferior in Quality to Navy Biscuit.	1 lb.	Sugar.
3 „	Wheaten Flour.	½ oz.	Salt.
3 „	Oatmeal.	½ oz.	Mustard.
6 ozs.	Rice.	½ „	Black or White Pepper ground.
2 lbs.	Peas.	½ gill	Vinegar.
3 „	Potatoes.	6 ozs.	Lime Juice.
2½ „	Beef.	1 lb.	Preserved Meat.
1 „	Pork.	6 ozs.	Suet.
1 „	Fat.	3 „	Raisins.
9 ozs.	Tea.	1 „	Butter.

Mess Utensils and Bedding to be supplied by the Ship.

For FRANK CHARLES THOMAS.

3 & 4, Fenchurch Street, London, E.C. 3.

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NOTICE TO STEERAGE PASSENGERS.

1.—If Steerage Passengers, through no default of their own, are not received on board on the day named in their Contract Tickets, or fail to obtain a Passage in the Ship, they should apply to the Emigration Officer at the Port, who will assist in obtaining redress under the Merchant Shipping Acts.

2.—Steerage Passengers should carefully keep this part of their Contract Ticket till after the end of the Voyage.

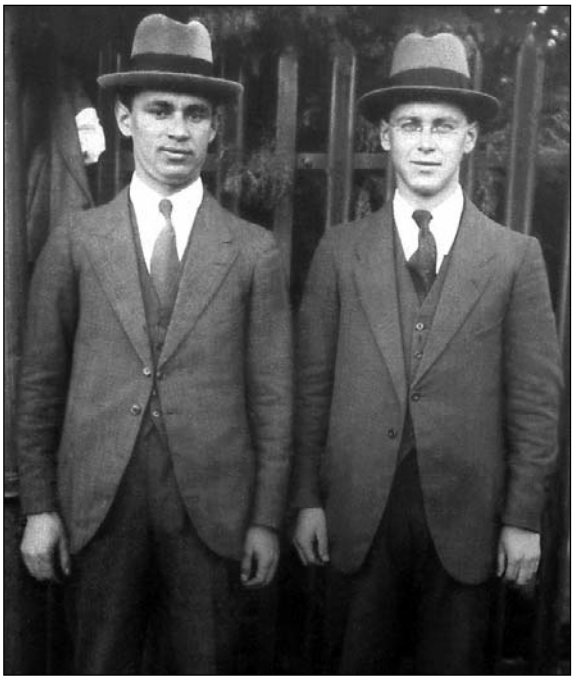
N.B.—This Contract Ticket is exempt from Stamp Duty.

* The Balance requires to be paid and this Contract Ticket receipted before the Passender can embark.

Harry's steerage ticket to South Africa.

After a few years of working in the drapery shop, Abe, got married and joined his father-in-law. Harry took over the shop and began to specialise more on the millinery side. He went on to make a great success of his business.

Harry was a most charitable person and helped many people. One of his character traits was never to permit anyone to pay when they were in his company. He was also a go-getter who enjoyed living life to the full. He was the



Abe and Harry in 1922.

first of our family to own a motor car, and I remember spending many hours touring and going on outings in his car.

One of our favourite outings was picnicking at various out-of-town farms or resorts. We would all pile into Harry's car and head out for new destinations with a picnic basket in the boot. I remember one particular occasion when we decided to go to a farm "Sunningdale" to the north-east of Johannesburg. It had been raining the day before and the road to the farm was extremely muddy. For some reason, Harry must have braked sharply, the car went into a skid and we landed up facing the opposite direction. Needless to say Harry was very careful when he drove back home afterwards. An interesting sequence to this story is the fact that my nephew Bernard and his wife Isarae and their family now live in Sunningdale. Whenever I visit them I cannot believe that it is the same place that was so muddy that Sunday.

Harry and his car.

Harry was very involved with the newly-arrived immigrants and the Krakenowo Sick Benefit Society and helped many young people settle into their new country. The immigrant community lived

either in the eastern suburbs of Doornfontein and Yeoville, or in the west in Malvern, Fordsburg and later Greenside. Harry kept his activities mainly in the east. Friday night was a big social night for young people. We would all have Shabbat dinner at home and afterwards we would walk round the neighbourhood in a *chug* (group) organised by Harry. We would meet the newcomers and help them integrate with other young people who had arrived earlier.

Harry was always a popular young man. He had many girlfriends, a number of whom joined us when we went on family outings. Morris and I would often go out with our brother who would introduce us to various people. Then in 1938, Harry met Rita Berman and, after a courtship, they decided to marry. Their wedding was held on 18 May 1938.

Harry was a devoted husband and I was very impressed with his habit of buying Rita flowers every Saturday when he returned from work.

Harry and Abe in the early 1930's.

Y.S. קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה Y.B.

Mr. & Mrs. J. Berman
and
Mr. & Mrs. W. Seeff
request the pleasure of your company at
the marriage of
Rita
to
Harry
at the
Beth Hamedrash Hagodel,
on
Wednesday, 18th May, 1938, at 7 p.m.

Reception: Ginsbergs Hall,
Gordon Terrace,
Doornfontein.

R.S.V.P.
17a, Beres Road, Bertrams
and 6 Raleigh Street, Yeoville

Harry and Rita's wedding invitation.

Harry and Rita's wedding portrait.

Even after their marriage Harry continued to visit our parents regularly. When his daughters were born he used to bring them to our house to visit their grandparents.

Harry and Rita's first home was in Hathorn Avenue, Sydenham where Bernice, Shulamit and Estelle were born. (Bernice's Hebrew name is Basia Bluma Hoda. When Rivel wrote us letters she referred to her niece by her Hebrew name as the English name was very foreign to the Lithuanian way of thinking.) As Harry's family grew, his business flourished and he and Rita began

to look for a bigger home. They finally found a house in Houghton with a very big garden. I always thought that the house was huge and was so proud of my brother's success.

My brother and his wife had four beautiful daughters. The eldest Bernice is married to Raymond Coll and they live in Rochester, New York. They have three children: Arieh (who married Lisa Popik) and they have a son Jacob. Their other children are Eytan and Gidon.

Shulamit, their second daughter, married David Strick, an Australian and went to live in Melbourne, Australia. They have two daughters: Amanda and Louise.

Estelle, the third daughter, married Harry Spain and moved to Durban. They have two daughters: Karen who married Michael Shuman and lives in Sydney, Australia; and Lisa.

Annette, the youngest daughter married Gordon Polovin and lives in Toronto, Canada. They have four children: Lauren, Suanne, Mark and Gregory.

Harry, unfortunately, became ill when quite young. This may have been a result of the stressful life he lived and the emotions which he suppressed. In 1952 he was diagnosed as suffering from a malignant tumour. His youngest daughter, Annette, was under a year old at the time. The family were devastated by the news. I tried my best to help and even went to London with him to see leading specialists in the field. It was all to no avail and he passed away at the young age of 54 on 18 February 1953, corresponding to 3 Adar 5713.

Rita and her daughters From left: Bernice, Rita, Shulamit. IN FRONT: Estelle.

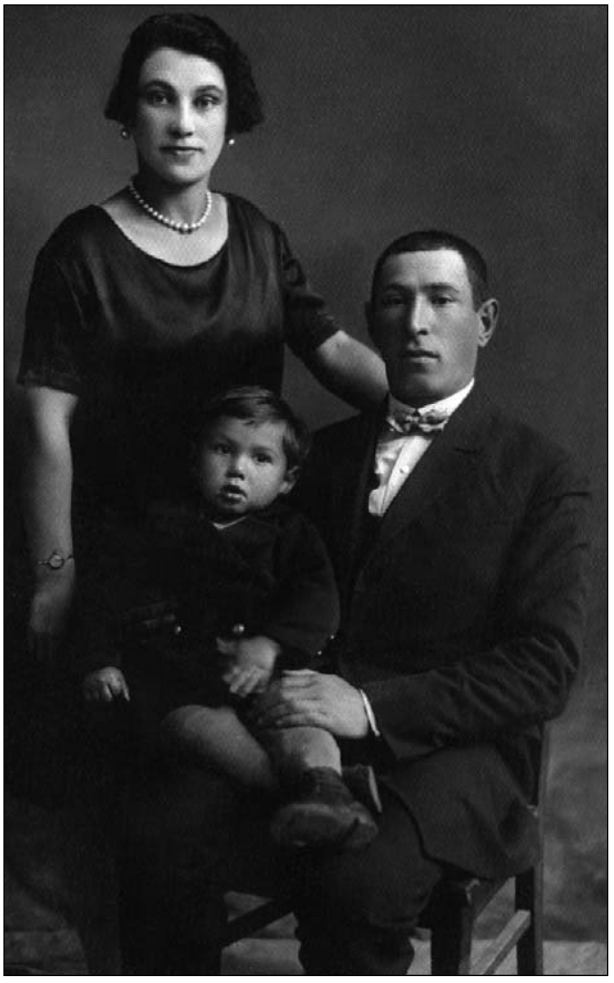
His second daughter Shulamit also died at a young age. She unfortunately suffered a cerebral haemorrhage which ended her life in 1976. Her daughter Louise still keeps in contact with the family.

Harry, Rita and Family. From left: Bernice, Shulamit, Estelle, Harry, Rita.
INSERT: Annette

The Resnick Family

In 1930 Moshe Gershon, Rodel's husband, found it very difficult to make a living as a butcher in Krakenowo. Food was scarce, especially meat, and there was little scope in his line of work. By that time Abe, Harry and I were already in South Africa and so we made the necessary arrangements to bring him to this country. Moshe Gershon had some family in Cape Town and he wanted to be with them, so we organised a job for him as a butcher in Woodstock, Cape Town.

Rodel remained in Krakenowo with Charlie and waited until Moshe Gershon was sufficiently settled to support them both in South Africa. When Rodel and Charlie finally arrived in 1935, they went to live with Moshe Gershon in Cape Town. Unfortunately, Moshe Gershon developed tuberculosis and the doctors advised him to return to the colder climate of Lithuania. He returned to Europe where he passed away in 1937 before the outbreak of the Second World War. Rodel and Charlie moved to Johannesburg. They were warmly welcomed by us all



Rodel, Charlie and Gershon Resnick.

and the two of them soon settled down in our home. We were, once again, a united family.

Rodel was a loving and caring sister. I was always sad that she had so many difficulties in her life. Even so, she was a strong woman who supported herself and her son and did the best she could under trying circumstances. She worked for us at Sydmore for many years as a clerk and managed to save a reasonable amount of money and was able to give her son Charlie a good education.

Rodel loved being with her family and felt safe and secure in the bosom of her extended relatives. There were times when she was very lonely living in her flat with her only son. She tried to be an independent person and we always included her in whatever we were doing. When my parents were alive she went

Rodel and Charlie

on holidays with them but after they passed away, she and Charlie would join members of the family when they went away. They joined Naomi and I on numerous holidays and spent many weekends with us.

In the last few years of her life a hip ailment and stomach pains prevented her from continuing work. She retired from Sydmore and had more time to spend on herself and her son. Rodel's health began to deteriorate and Purim 1981 was not a very happy time for us. She finally passed away just after Shushan Purim on 21 March 1981, corresponding to 16 Adar II 5741.

Rodel with our parents in Muizenberg.

Charlie grows to adulthood

Charlie, Rodel's son, was a young child of nine when he arrived in Cape Town. He was an exceptionally good scholar, excelling at mathematics. He could rapidly master any problem which involved calculation. He gained many awards for his achievements while at school.

At the age of 16 he became apprenticed to Sydmore Engineering and qualified as a fitter and turner. In 1939 he volunteered to serve as a soldier for the South African Army against Hitler. As a result of poor health while in the army,

Charlie – 8 years old

he was discharged. Charlie had some idiocyncracies, but he had a very good head for numbers. He became quite adept at playing the stock exchange and made sound investments which enabled him to stop working and gave him the opportunity to travel.

My nephew never married and, after Rodel died, he lived on his own in Berea. He enjoyed being with the family and used to quote all the Jewish proverbs which had been handed down from his grandparents.

Unfortunately, a tragedy ended Charlie's life. He was very close to my sister Nina's children and would spend much time with his cousin Ronnie Kaplan, his wife Yvonne and their children Cindy, Jeremy, Aran and Dina. One fateful Sunday afternoon on 18 June 1995, corresponding to 20 Sivan 5755, when South Africa was preparing for its victory in world rugby, Jeremy took Charlie for a drive in his new motor car. While on the highway, the car skidded and the emergency airbags were inflated, obscuring Jeremy's view. Jeremy was killed on impact as the car overturned. Charlie was flung out of the car and was seriously injured.

Charlie's last days

I was on holiday in the United States at the time of the accident. On my return home, I went directly from the airport to Charlie's hospital bed where he lay comatose. He seemed, however, to be aware of my presence. He passed away

soon after that on Shabbat 8 July 1995, corresponding to 9 Tammuz 5755, having lingered for three weeks in the intensive care unit at the Milpark Hospital.

Charlie was a generous man, both in life and death. He supported Jewish institutions, especially the Yeo Street Shul in Yeoville where he *davened*. In his will he remembered all members of his mother's family and some of his father's family in Cape Town. He also left money to various charitable organisations.

Jeremy Kaplan

Jeremy was a special young man who always had a ready smile. He was very concerned about everyone in the family and was available to help them whenever he could. Morris was once knocked over by a taxi outside the West Street Shul. Without any hesitation, Jeremy ran into the road, picked Morris up and carried him into the *shul*. He was a very strong chap, because believe me, my brother was no lightweight. He looked after Morris and did not relax until he had been taken to the doctor.

Jeremy had a very good business brain and from an early age was involved with a variety of ventures. He also assisted his father, Ronnie with his work for

Charlie and Jeremy – 1995.

Yeshiva College, and was always available when their annual wine-making project was in progress. He helped from the moment the grapes were bought, right up to the end product when the wine had to be decanted into the bottles and dispatched to various destinations.

Jeremy was a popular boy who had a wide circle of friends. They proved to be a tower of strength to Ronnie and Yvonne when the tragedy struck. He loved motor cars and it is ironic that it was a car that caused his death.

Ronnie and Yvonne, and indeed the whole family, will never forget this wonderful person who was cut down so early in his life. I wish them strength and compassion in their sad loss.

Our pearl of a girl – Nina

Nina in Cape Town with her brothers – 1935.
From left: Abe, Nina, Harry.

Nina was the only one of us who was not born in Krakenowo. She came into the world during our exile in Pochinki, Russia, on the fifth day of Chanukah corresponding to 14 December 1917. Nina was happy from the moment she was born and it was always a delight to be in her company.

Abe, Harry and I went to Cape Town to meet the boat bringing our family to the safe shores of South Africa. Nina had thoroughly enjoyed the voyage and viewed it as a great adventure. We stayed in Cape Town for a few days and Nina loved

Nina and Beni's wedding BACK ROW: unknown, Sydney, Charlie, Nina, Beni, Morris, Rodel. FRONT ROW: Chana Sora, Ada Nathanson, Esther Rieback, Dora Slonimsky, Bella, Judith Kaplan, Velvel (Sholem Ze'ev).

everything we showed her. We took her to the beachfront and could not believe it when she actually swam in the sea at Sea Point, seemingly immune to the cold current, for she was used to the icy waters of Europe.

On holiday in Durban BACK ROW (from left): Sydney FRONT: Abe, Nina, Morris.

Soon after Nina arrived she decided she wanted a job. Sydmore Engineering was expanding and we needed someone to prepare wages. Nina filled this position and was happy to be part of our growing business. She proved to be a very capable and trustworthy young lady who was liked by all. My sister was blessed with a very good memory and I was always amazed at her ability to remember telephone numbers. She loved to sing and could pick up and remember the

Nina and Beni and their children
BACK ROW (from left): Beni, Shoshana, Ronnie. FRONT ROW: Nina, Leonard, Alan.

words and tunes of songs. She was a beautiful, popular young woman who had many friends and suitors.

She finally chose one of the suitors as a husband and in 1942 married Beni Kaplan at a ceremony held at the Yeoville Shul. Nina and Beni had four lovely children. The eldest, Ronnie, married Yvonne Gelvan. They had four children: Cindy (who married Jonathan Herring), Jeremy (who died tragically in a car accident), and one set of twins, Aran and Dina.

Shoshana, Nina and Beni's daughter, married Dr Gerald Kaplan. Their four daughters are Daniela (who married Adam Saffer) and their baby Avigail; Ramona, Yehudit and Gila.

Their second son Alan married Sheryl Levin and they have two children: Warren and Romi. Leonard, the youngest, emigrated to Australia with his wife Michelle Peskin and their two children Dean and Nicole.

Nina had the most marvellous disposition. She always had a smile on her face and looked for the positive in life. Her husband and children were devoted to her. She loved spending time with her sister and brothers and their families. Her greatest delight was to sit around the seder table as we did way back in Krakenowo, and sing the songs together with her family. She liked to know what was happening in her extended family's life and was a most concerned member should the need arise.

Entertaining family in 1970
FROM LEFT: Ronnie, Yvonne, Nina, Beni, Shoshana, Abe.

Nina and Beni loved to entertain. My sister had wonderful culinary skills and her *gefilte* fish was legendary. When they lived in Yeoville, she and Beni used to host a *kiddush* for the family and community, almost every Shabbat. Pickled and chopped herring, as well as the famous *gefilte* fish, were firm favourites on the menu.

Unfortunately while on a holiday in Israel with Beni in 1984, Nina had a stroke which left her debilitated for the remaining years of her life. Much of her sparkle went out after the illness and she suffered for nine years. She died on 22 July 1993, corresponding to 4 Av 5753, and was initially buried in Johannesburg. Later Beni and the children buried her earthly remains in the Sanhedria Cemetery in Jerusalem.

Nina and Beni's four children – 1993.
BACK ROW (from left): Ronnie, Leonard FRONT ROW: Alan, Shoshana.

Nina and Beni's grandchildren. BACK ROW (from left): Warren, Romi, Dina, Ramona, Aran
MIDDLE ROW: Jeremy, Dean. FRONT ROW: Yehudit, Gila, Cindy, Daniela. ABSENT: Nicole

A tribute to Morris

My brother Morris was a very central character in my life. We were not only brothers and friends, but were partners in business for sixty-six years. We had a remarkable relationship throughout our lives. Our close ties started when we were very young, living in Krakenowo where we spent much of our time together. Our oldest brother, Abe, had already emigrated to South Africa. Our two sisters, Rodel and Rivel, spent most of their time together. That left us, the three boys, Harry, Morris and myself, to keep ourselves occupied. Harry, of course, was much older than Morris and me and was not really interested in the things with which we were involved. When we moved to Russia, Harry became more of a teacher to us, rather than a brother with whom one played. Nina was just a baby in Russia and when she grew up, looked to her older siblings in admiration.

So from a young age, both in Krakenowo and later in Potchinki in Russia, Morris and I spent a great deal of time together. By the time we returned to Krakenowo in 1921, our love for each other was firmly entrenched. We socialised and played together. There were just two years between us, a difference which became less and less significant over the years.

I was very proud of my younger brother's achievements. I remember feeling a sense of pride when I went to the Neviazhe one winter morning with my home-made skates which he had crafted. He was always fixing and building things when we were young. He had an enquiring mind and wanted to know how everything worked.

When we came to South Africa we had to fend for ourselves. We could not rely on our parents for material support and did not want to burden Abe and Harry. As I have mentioned, I went into farming as I had an interest in the land. Morris arrived with his ORT qualifications and went to look for a job in that field. As fate would have it, we were both living in Johannesburg when he decided to go into business on his own. Harry and Abe were already established in their businesses and it was only natural that I should join my younger brother, Morris.

My brother never failed to amaze me with his many skills and genius for

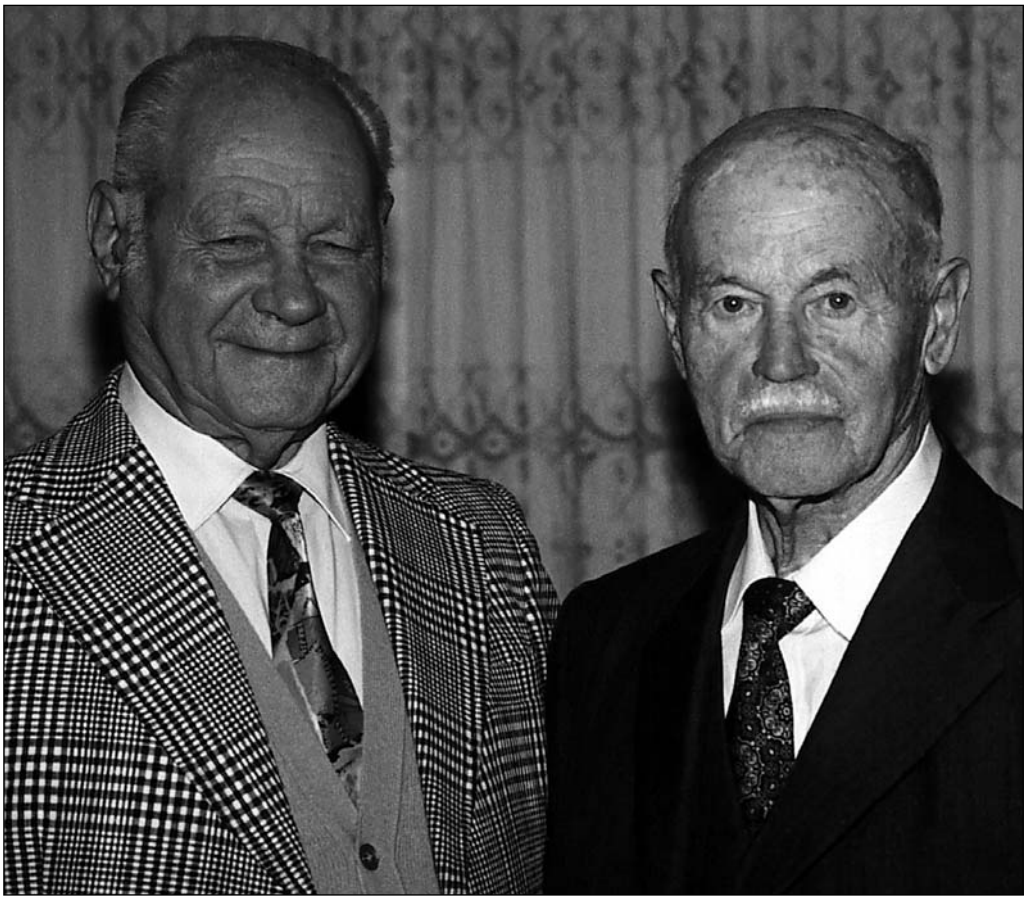
making things. If something had to be done which was mechanical, Morris would find a way to do it. Not only would he do it, but he would improve on an existing method. His scope of interest was vast. He concerned himself with machinery and manufacture, which was our business. However, he pursued his other interests and made a water purification plant; he worked out how to extract oil from the geranium; he made home improvements; he invented a different method for removing staples from a page. His fertile mind was forever on the lookout for new challenges.

Our partnership was very successful. We trusted one another implicitly. As far as I was concerned, Morris knew what was needed in the workshop and later in the factory. On the other hand, he gave me complete reign of the finances and administration of the company. Having said that, however, we always let the other know what our intentions were. For many years we used to meet every Monday night at one of our homes. When Abe was still alive, he would join us and we would thrash out our plans and make decisions for the week ahead. Unfortunately, over the past few years, this practice has lapsed, although our sons Stanley and Bernard still meet to discuss future strategy.

One would imagine that being in business together all day, we would tire of one another but this did not happen. To a large extent we were very fortunate in our choice of spouses. Both Naomi and Dora were very accepting of our family. They were always amenable to every family function or outing. They both got on extremely well, which allowed Morris and I to continue our friendship.

Our lives were not completely free of conflict. There were many times we had heated arguments as we are both strong-willed and stubborn. Yet we both had an enormous capacity to love and thus to forgive the other.

We established many routines together. I have mentioned some of them during the course of this book of memories. We spent many wonderful weekends with our parents and extended families. We holidayed together, both locally and overseas. The family bought a flat in Muizenberg and for many years we have gone there together on an annual vacation. Over the years, our little band of four has expanded to include Sally Gordon, Naomi's sister, and Charlotte Leifer, Dora's sister. This was a wonderful arrangement as the women were happy to play cards or bridge, while Morris and I were content to walk along the beach, talk or simply watch television in companionable silence. We have also spent many a holiday in the flat in Durban. At both these venues, Morris would spend a great deal of time and energy repairing and altering the



Morris and Sydney 1997

premises. He put in an air-conditioning unit, he changed the window frames, he enclosed a passageway. As long as he had something to occupy his inventive mind, my brother was happy.

Morris was a family man and loved being among his nearest and dearest. For many years he and Dora hosted a family seder which included their family, Abe and Gertie, Nina and Beni and their children, Rodel and Charlie and my family. We established traditions in those days which the next generation continues. One in particular is the singing of *Chad Gadya* in Yiddish. It has taken nearly thirty years for Morris and I to recollect the words. Our children then wrote down the words in order for all the family to learn and it has truly become a "Seeff" custom. (See Appendix V.)

There was no sibling rivalry between us. Whatever we had, we shared. We started this when we were young and continued into our advanced years. I was happy to share all we had in business, always giving Morris a bit more because he had a larger family. Morris was very generous. Whatever he had or bought, he would offer to me first. He loved my son Stanley as a son, as I loved his four children, Ruth, Denise Joyce and Bernard.

He was my brother, my friend, my partner in life. It is with deep sadness that I witnessed his passing on 20 January 1998, corresponding to 23 Tevet 5757. I miss him and his company very deeply.

PORTAL SEVEN

Golden years

Golden years in South Africa

South Africa has been very good to me. I have been part of this society for seventy-two years and have seen enormous changes during this time. When I look back now I see how fortunate I have been, enjoying many golden years surrounded by a warm and loving family.

When I first arrived, my greatest concern was how I was going to make a living. For me, making money was never an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. Helping others was always my primary objective. I also enjoy new challenges and adventure. Morris and I loved being involved in new ventures and as soon as we had a little money and had given a share to charity, we looked for new frontiers.

Our first farm

Morris and I never intended to become involved with farms, but one never knows what the future holds and how circumstances will work out. It is true we both loved the outdoors and the freshness of country air. Being in the country always reminded us of our carefree days in the *wald* (forest) around Krakenowo. However, we were both content to work for our fledgling company and were thrilled at the progress we were making. It soon became evident that we would need new premises as we were spilling out into the street in Sivewright Avenue. As I mentioned before, we bought land in Wadeville for Power Steel, but we still needed to house Sydmore in a larger area. We looked around for suitable land and found a small farm in Bedfordview (the airport highway now runs through this land). Morris and I bought 10 acres, hoping to convert it into industrial land for our factory. Unfortunately we could not get permission. We therefore became "farmers" and rented out this farm to tenant farmers.

Our second farm

My brother and I were always interested in new ideas and technology. One day we met a Czechoslovakian architect, Vavra. His plan was to extract the essential oils from the indigenous geranium plant as this oil was unavailable at the time. This was in the 1940s when the idea of essential oils was not as popular as it is in the 1990s. We decided to investigate this market and found that there was a possible opening. Geranium oil, we discovered, could be used as an insect repellant and is a good astringent and sedative. Morris and I agreed to take up the challenge and embarked upon this project.

This time we needed to find proper farming land. The geranium plant we were told, flourishes in sandy soil rather than acid soil. Our farm in Bedfordview had acid soil and so could not be used for the cultivation we required. We searched various properties looking for sandy soil and finally found a farm on the Jukskei River called Swartkop Valley. It was 25 kilometres north of Johannesburg in what is today the Fourways region. We bought the farm together with a partner Mr Brodie on a fifty-fifty basis for eleven thousand pounds in the early 1940s. The farm not only had the correct soil we required, but also had asbestos mineral deposits. It was also used as a popular holiday resort. We often went to the farm with my parents as well Dora's parents and had picnics on the bank of the river.

The farm proved to be ideal for geraniums. Once the plants grew with assistance from Mr Vavra, the time came to actually extract the oil. Morris naturally set his mind to the task and came up with a solution. He developed a system of heating the plant. A steam would form containing minute droplets of oil. Once this cooled, the oil rose to the top of the moisture; it then ran off into a container and was bottled. Morris and I loved the whole idea of this operation and every Sunday we would drive out to inspect the activities. We continued the process for two years until our partner Mr Brodie began to have financial difficulties. A doctor approached us to buy a portion of the farm under the pretext of rearing horses. We sold a portion to him and he subsequently divided up the land for a housing development. We sold the remainder of the farm in 1952.

Picnicking with the ladies.
FROM LEFT: Chana Sora, Bertha Miller, Dora, Sydney, Naomi.

Morris gets married

As I said before, Harry, Morris, Nina and I had a wonderful social life and shared many good times together. Whenever Harry took a girl out, Morris would ask if she had a younger sister. When Harry got married, Morris and I were left to our own devices. On one occasion, Morris met a young lady without the help of his older brother Harry. Morris and two friends went to Freda

Lipshitz's wedding and, during the evening, Morris noticed a very pretty young girl. He asked her name and was told it was Dora Miller. He invited her on a date but she refused. Morris became too embarrassed to ask her out again, thinking she preferred his friends. Morris's friends on the other hand persuaded him to try one more time. The rest is history. Morris and Dora dated for a year before they married in 1943.

קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה

Mr. & Mrs. J. Miller and Mr. & Mrs. W. Seeff
request the pleasure of your company at the marriage of
Dora
to
Morris
on Sunday, 5th September, 1943
at the Wolmarans Street Synagogue
at 2.30 p.m.

Reception: 3.15—5.45 p.m.
Ginsberg Hall,
12 Gordon Terrace

R.S.V.P.: 16 Van der Merwe Street,
Hillbrow,
Johannesburg

Morris and Dora's wedding invitation.

Morris and Dora managed to find accommodation in Yeoville in a building called Olympia Mansions. They lived there for two years and when Ruth, their eldest daughter, was one year old they moved to 22 Page Street, Yeoville. My parents, Rodel, Charlie and I continued to stay in Hunter Street. Abe and Gertie were living in Muller Street. Nina by that time had married Beni Kaplan and they lived in Myra Court, Bellevue, with their oldest son Ronnie. Harry and Rita had moved further away and were living in Hathorne Avenue, Sydenham, with their two oldest daughters, Bernice and Shulamit. Even though we were no longer all living together, we spent most weekends picnicking or visiting each other. While our parents were alive, all activities included them and we would specially choose locations where they could manage to walk and enjoy the outing.

Morris and Dora's wedding.
BACK ROW (from left): Sydney, Beni, Nina, Gertie, Abe. THIRD ROW: Grace Joffe, Ida Fram, Harry, Rita, Sarah Farber, Rodel, Monty Miller, Sholem Ze'ev. SECOND ROW: Joseph Miller, Bertha Miller, Charlotte Miller, Dora, Morris, Leah Ogus, Chana Sora. FRONT ROW: Shura Feldman. Bernice Seeff, Minnie Feldman, Michael Feldman.

Family time

We continued our practice of seeing each other on Sundays, even after the passing of our father in 1947 and our mother in 1950. My brothers and I enjoyed being outdoors and swimming was one of our favourite activities. We established a routine of going to a public swimming pool most Sunday mornings during the summer. Initially we attended the Yeoville Baths and in later years we moved to Paterson Park Baths in Norwood. We would generally leave our wives at home and take the older children with us. Morris brought Ruth and Denise; Joyce and Bernard joined the routine a few years later. Abe or I would fetch Nina's oldest two children, Ronnie and Shoshana. When my son, Stanley, was old enough, he too joined our customary Sunday morning outing. Abe loved to spoil his nieces and nephews and would buy a large packet of sweets for them to share. At a later stage, I also adopted the habit of buying everyone sweets.

Sydney and Morris sparring

Swimming was not our only pastime. Some weekends we would pack our cars and take our wives, children and in-laws on a picnic to either the farm in Bedfordview, or to Swartkops Valley. The children loved the chickens and the dogs as well as picking apricots and peaches

Morris, Harry and Abe enjoying a Sunday afternoon (about 1932)

from the orchards in Bedfordview. We never had to ask twice if they wanted to join us.

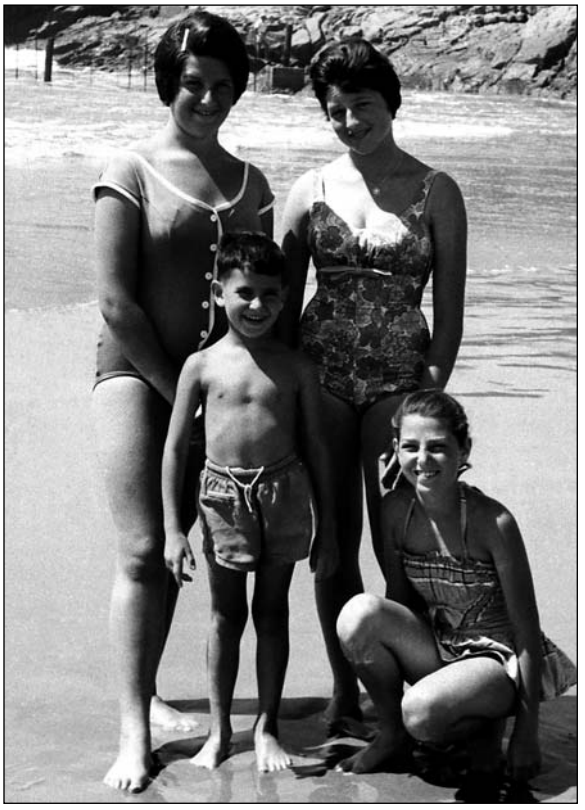
During the colder winter months the children would come with us to the factory in Doornfontein. They used to potter about in the office while Morris, Abe and I discussed some business matter. We kept the children occupied with stamping pads and paper and they all played happily talking to each other on the phones and acting all grown up. Occasionally they came into the factory itself. For some reason they liked to collect round punchings from the machines – I suspect they used them as play money! They also collected ball-bearings which they used together with their marbles. Morris and I were only too happy that the children were interested in our workplace and were glad to oblige their collections.

Extended family (about 1950).
BACK ROW: Abe, Nina, Beni, Bertha Miller, Charlotte Miller, Salome Kaplan, Jack Kaplan. FRONT ROW: Sydney, Mr Goldberg, Morris, Gertie, Rita, Naomi, Harry, Dora.

Morris' family grows up

Dora and Morris have four lovely children; Ruth Leone, Denise Helen, Joyce Valerie and Bernard Roy. They were all born while the family lived in Yeoville. Bertha Miller, Morris' mother-in-law, came to live with the family after her husband Joseph died in 1949. Morris was very happy to have her stay with them and he made many alterations to his home in Page Street. Morris would sit up at night in the dining room and design kitchen layouts, garages, the enclosure of a balcony, as well as details of a front gate, or garage doors.

With four children and his mother-in-law, the accommodation became very cramped. My brother began the search for an open stand to design and build his own house.



Morris and Dora's children (about 1959).
BACK ROW (from left): Denise, Ruth.
FRONT ROW: Bernard, Joyce.

As I mentioned, in the late 1940s and early 1950s we were very keen to buy property. We spent many weekends looking at industrial and commercial land. We needed industrial sites for our business and looked in Germiston and Wadeville predominantly. We finally bought land in Wadeville for Power Steel in 1947 and in Elandsfontein for Sydmore Engineering in the early 1950s. We also looked at domestic properties as Morris and I thought it would be a good idea to live near our workplace. Our search took us to Lambton in Germiston

but our wives did not agree with our thinking. Morris and Dora finally found an acre site at 11 First Avenue, Lower Houghton.

The property was part of a four acre sub-division. The portion that Morris and Dora bought had a wonderful rose garden, a row of stables and a hayloft. They were delighted with their purchase. Morris immediately set to work to design his new home. He worked with an architect Mr Jacobson and together they decided to use the fall of the land and make a large playroom under the reception rooms, which were at street level. That room became a focal point for many family gatherings and celebrations. It was also the room in which Morris and Dora hosted large family Pesach seders for almost 40 years.

Morris and Dora and children at their Golden Anniversary – 1993.
BACK ROW: (from left) Joyce, Denise, Ruth, Bernard. FRONT ROW: Morris, Dora.

The children grow up and get married

Ruth, their eldest child decided to become a teacher after she left school. She completed her BA Degree in history and psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand and then completed her teacher training. She taught for a year or two until she met Dr Abe Fait, a qualified dentist. They became engaged during the Six Day War in 1967 and were married in September of that year. A year later they presented Morris and Dora with their first grandchild, Loren. Ruth and Abe now have four lovely children. After her child-rearing years Ruth decided to use her psychology background for the benefit of the family business. We employed her at Sydmore Engineering to head up our public relations department, and to handle the company's advertising. She subsequently began running her own business Meta-Wall, which is associated with Symo Corporation.

Their eldest daughter, Loren, studied accountancy at the University of the Witwatersrand and after she qualified worked for the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg. She is now married to Farrel Datt and they have moved to Melbourne with their little daughter Talia. Ruth and Abe's second daughter, Nicky, studied law at the University of the Witwatersrand. She was admitted to the Bar in 1996 and is currently working for a law firm. She married Steven Dave and they live in Johannesburg. Gavin, their third child, is studying for a Bachelor of Commerce degree. He works part-time with Ruth at Meta-Wall, and is involved with the running of Sydmore, the hardware division of Symo Corporation. Sharon, the youngest child, followed in her mother's footsteps and is studying to be a teacher.

Denise, Morris and Dora's second daughter studied pharmacy at the Witwatersrand Technical College. She has been working in this field since she qualified in 1968. For the past 20 years she has worked at Bramley Pharmacy. She married Jack Shapiro in 1969, just before the first man landed on the moon. They have two daughters: Carol-Ann (named after my mother Chana Sora Shapiro) and Gayle. Carol-Ann obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of the Witwatersrand and then completed a post graduate diploma in human resource management. She now works in public relations and is also

Morris, Dora and family – 1997.
BACK ROW (from left): Colin, Ronit, Laurence, Gavin, Farrel, Sharon, Nicky.
THIRD ROW: Tami, Neville, Jack, Gayle, Carol-Ann, Loren, Talia, Abe, Isarae, Steven.
SECOND ROW: Joyce, Denise, Dora, Morris, Ruth, Bernard.
FRONT ROW: Bianca, Antony, Daniel.

involved in the advertising industry. Gayle, like her mother, was attracted to the para-medical world. She completed a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of the Witwatersrand and is now studying dietetics at the University of Cape Town. She is also very involved with the running of Betar Youth in South Africa.

Morris and Dora's third daughter, Joyce, studied and qualified as a town planner at the University of the Witwatersrand. She was never completely happy in this field and, many years later, after her children had grown up, she went back to study. This time she took up nursery school teaching and studied through the University of South Africa (UNISA). She now works for the South African Jewish Board of Education as a co-ordinator of Judaic studies at Jewish Nursery Schools. Joyce married Neville Levin in 1970 and they have three children. Ronit, their eldest, completed her BA degree in sociology and psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. She married Laurence Sarakinsky in 1997 and now works with him in a lighting company. Colin, Joyce and Neville's second child, is studying electrical engineering at the Witwatersrand Technikon; while Tami, the youngest child, is studying architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Morris and Dora's youngest child and only son, Bernard, followed in his father's footsteps and studied mechanical engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand. On completion of his course, he went to the USA to do an MBA at UCLA. He returned to South Africa and married Isarae Krost. Bernard has worked at Symo since his return from America. He studied computers while he was away and the implementation of this knowledge has made a dramatic difference to the running of the company. Bernard and Isarae have three children: Antony, Bianca and Daniel. They are still at school and are yet to decide on where their futures lie.

My life with Naomi

Sydney and Naomi.

My family have been a real source of strength to me. I have been blessed with a good marriage. The maiden name of my *bashierte* was Naomi Gordon. She was the niece of Mr Olswang for whom I worked at Bodenstein in the Western Transvaal. She came from Pretoria originally and went to an Afrikaans-medium school. Naomi and I were introduced to each other at the Sheva Brachot held after my friend Solly Liebgott's wedding. We fell in love and got engaged in September 1945. When it came to arranging a date for the wedding, I was insistent that we choose a time when the factory was closed for the summer holidays. We decided on Sunday 9 December 1945 and were mar-

קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה

The pleasure of your company is requested
at the marriage of

Naomi

Daughter of Mrs. E. Gordon and
the late Mr. J. Gordon

to

Sydney

Son of Mr. & Mrs. W. Seeff
at the Yeoville Synagogue

on

Sunday, 9th December, 1945,
at 2.30 p.m.

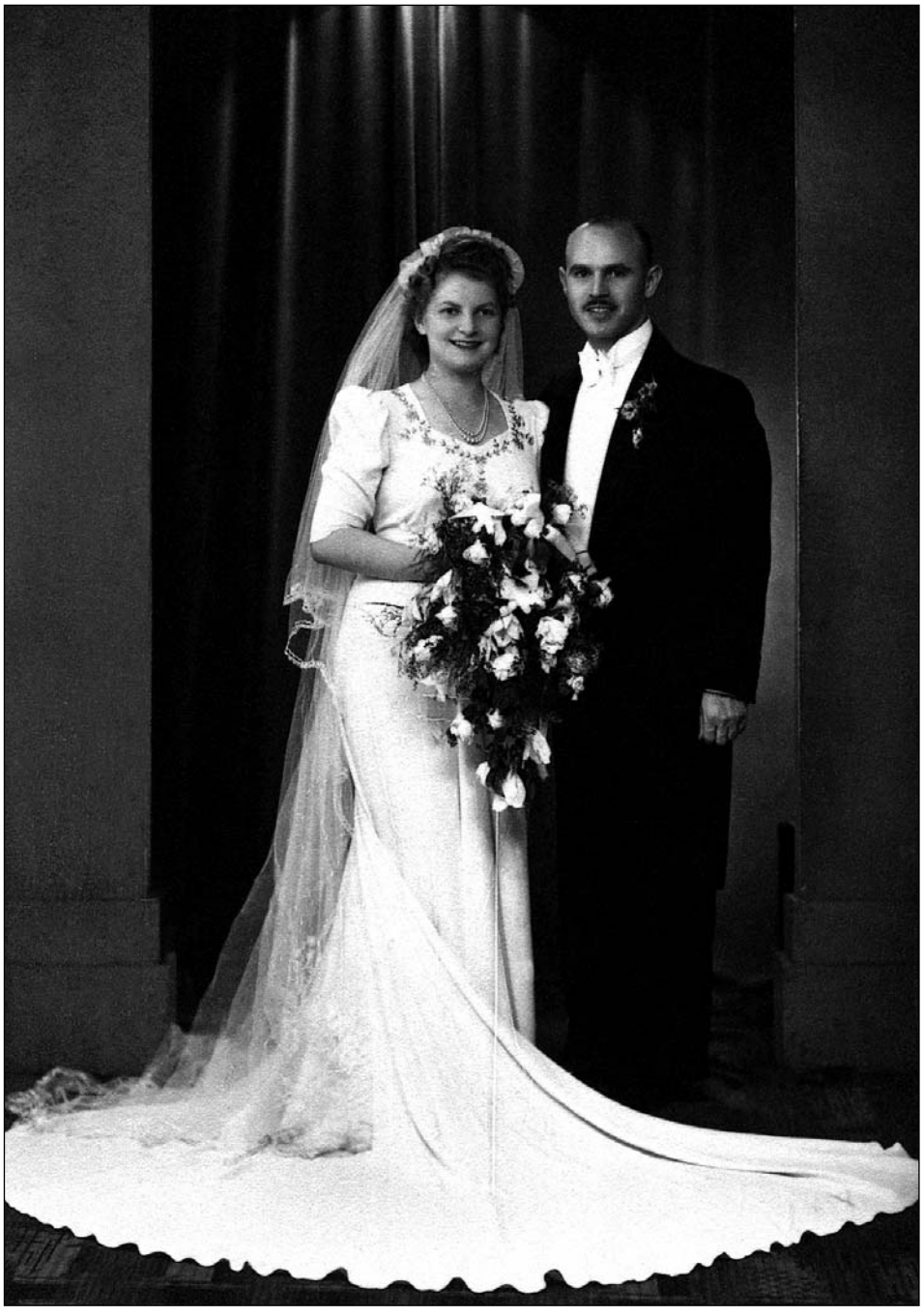
RECEPTION: 3-15 TO 6 P.M.,
GINSBERG HALL,
12, GORDON TERRACE,
JOHANNESBURG.

R.S.V.P.:
4, ST. MICHAELS COURT,
69, ISIPINGO STREET,
BELLEVUE EAST,
OFF DELAREY STREET.

ried by the late Rabbi Lapin at the Yeoville Shul. We honeymooned at the Cumberland Hotel in Durban and returned to Johannesburg in time for the opening of the factory in the new year.

I left my parents' home in Hunter Street, Yeoville and moved into a small flat in Olympia Mansions in Yeo Street, with my young wife. Morris and Dora had been living in the flat, but had moved into a house. There was a lack of accommodation due to the war, so we were lucky that things worked out so well. Within five years, we too, were able to move to our own house at 16 Roslin Street, Sydenham.

Sydney and Naomi: outside Yeoville Shul



Our wedding portrait 1945.

The birth of our son Stanley

Stanley – two months

We were blessed by the birth of our son Stanley Joseph on 16 October 1952. We had waited for him for seven years and his arrival gave us joy which knew no bounds. He was named after my late father Sholem Ze'ev and his second name Yosef from Naomi's late father. He was a premature baby and, although we were excited about his birth, we were worried about his size. I remember weighing him each day to see if he had put on any weight. He gained very slowly. In fact, he had his *pidyon haben* after the customary one month but he only had his *bris* on the following day!

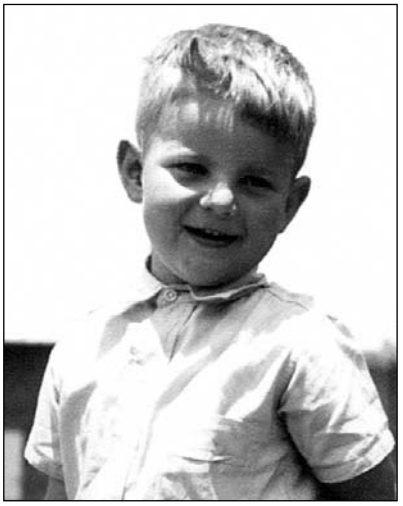
Since we were members of the Sydenham Highlands North Shul, we naturally sent him to the *shul's* nursery school where he always had a lot of friends with whom to play. Even at that early age it was obvious to all that he loved motor cars. When we drove around in our car or went for a walk, he would constantly be on the lookout for the different types of cars and could rattle off all their names. The best present anyone could buy him was a toy car of any shape or size. To this day he continues to have a fascination with cars.

Not all my memories of Stanley and cars are pleasant. When he was about eight or nine years old, he and Bernard, Morris's son, decided to try their hand at driving a car while Morris and I were visiting the factory in Elandsfontein one Sunday morning. After they finished playing, they linked a cable to the back of the car and attached it to a row of manufactured door-frames. The next morning when one of our employees drove the car forward, the whole row of doorframes came crashing down. You can just imagine the driver's fright. When I heard

about it, I realised Stanley had played some part in the prank. On my return home that evening I sat him down very quietly and, rather than thrash him, explained what the consequences of his actions were. My idea of discipline has not been to use anger and force, but rather explanation. In this particular case, I demonstrated my point using a hairbrush as an example of a car. Stanley, however, feeling very guilty, kept eyeing this brush almost waiting for the hiding he thought he would receive. I have no doubt he got the message about how destructive his action had been!

The other incident involving Stanley and vehicles was the time I found out he had been riding around on the back of a motorbike. Each of our companies had an annual Christmas party for the staff. One year at the Morlite party at the hangar at Rand Airport, one of the employees had a motorbike. Stanley couldn't resist the offer to go for a ride. He and our neighbour's daughter, Eleanor, and the driver, a third year apprentice, all mounted the bike and went for a spin around Germiston Lake. Stanley came back very excited and couldn't wait to tell me. Again I explained very carefully the dangers of his actions and warned him never to do it again. My warning apparently did not work because not an hour later I discovered him and Eleanor on the same motorbike again. I was furious with Stanley. I think that when I smacked him and Eleanor, it was the only occasion that I ever raised my hand to him. My fear for his safety caused me to do something that was totally foreign to my nature. When I think of what could have happened...

With Stanley
(three years)



Stanley (four years)

Naomi's activities

With Esther, Naomi and Rabbi Meller outside our home in Percelia – 1967.

When Stanley was three years old we moved to a new, large and spacious house in Fifth Avenue, Percelia, where Naomi and I still live. At that stage Naomi's mother, Esther Gordon, moved in with us and I was pleased that we could accommodate her.

Naomi and I loved to have the family over to visit. We were keen for Stanley to spend time with his cousins as he was an only child. Stanley became very

Naomi's family –
Effie Gordon, Sally Gordon and Naomi.

close to all his cousins both on my side as well as Naomi's. Today I can proudly say that he is a well-balanced man with a strong sense of family connection.

While I was busy with Sydmore and all my communal work, Naomi stayed at home and looked after our precious son. She was involved with the Ladies' Guild at the *shul* and could be relied on to give support when it was needed. Naomi has always been interested in all types of sport. We both began to play bowls at the Jewish Guild Club in Morningside. I remained a mediocre player while Naomi became very proficient. She served on the committee of the Ladies' Bowl Section and became chairman in 1957/58. I was very proud of her achievements and ability.

Over the years Naomi has run a veritable hotel from our home in Percelia. As a result of my involvement in *shul* affairs I offered our home to people who came to visit our congregation. Rabbi Poupko and his wife Esther came to stay, as did Chazan Yacov Charka, his wife and family. Added to that Naomi opened our home to members of my family who also came to stay for extended periods of time. Shaia (Israel) Stein moved in with us before his family moved up from Cape Town. Many years later his granddaughter Heidi also came to stay and got married from our house. When my brother Abe became ill and could not stay in his own home, he came to stay with us for many months before he passed away. My nephew Charlie Resnick also spent some weeks with us. We took in some young Israeli boys too when Stanley was in the army and the house felt so empty.

Stanley grows to adulthood

Stanley went to King David Linksfield Primary School and then on to the High School. We had our first taste of separation when Stanley went with the school on the ulpan course to Israel for three months in 1967. The house was so quiet without him, but Naomi and I both realised that we could not hold onto Stanley forever and we had to let him discover the world for himself. Stanley came back and seemed to be more mature. The rest of his school career was not very marked and I think he was only too happy to finally matriculate and be free to do as he chose. His newly-found freedom did not last long as he was called up to the South African Defence Force to do his compulsory service. Naomi and I were heartbroken to have our son called up to the army but were pacified when we found out he would be posted close to home at Lenz, south of Johannesburg.

Stanley's Barmitzvah –1965

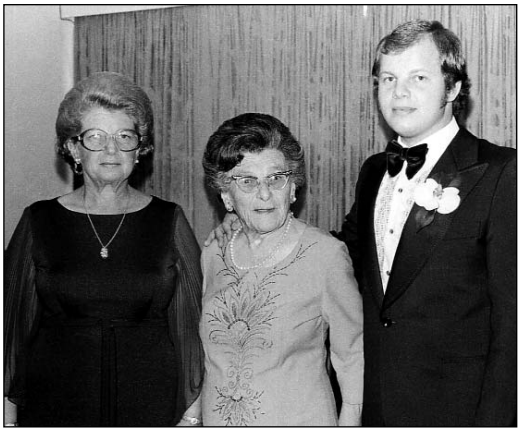
All too soon the Defence Force moved him, this time to Grootfontein in South West Africa (Namibia). We were anxious about this move but were thankful he did not go further north where there was action in the Rhodesian bush-war and Angola.

The army service eventually came to an end and we welcomed Stanley back home with open and loving arms. Stanley enrolled as an engineering student at the University of the Witwatersrand to prepare him to go into the family business. Stanley's heart just was not in his studies and after some months he left this tertiary establishment. He then enrolled at a college and became a student of the trade that his uncle, my brother Morris, loved so much. I refer, of course, to the art of tool and die-making. After completing this course he joined our firm.

Stanley gets married

There was a lovely young lady who worked in the Sydenham Highlands North *shul* office. Her name was Ingrid Lederman. The rabbi at that stage, Rabbi Louis Herring, felt it would be a good idea to set up a Jewish singles club to enable Jewish boys and girls to meet. He approached Ingrid, who was a very efficient secretary to organise the venture. The rabbi suggested that she should get in touch with Mr Sydney Seeff's son, Stanley. Amazingly enough, Stanley had never met this young woman. The Singles Club became a reality as a result of Stanley and Ingrid's hard work. They organised movies, casino evenings and general get-togethers. After each event everyone would go home, but poor Stanley and Ingrid would be left to clean up. They began to grow tired of the whole thing and decided one night to give it all up once the club had notched up at least one *shidduch*. Needless to say their relationship developed into a romance and they themselves became the first *shidduch*.

Stanley and Ingrid's wedding 1976.



Stanley's wedding. From left: Naomi, Esther Gordon, Stanley.

When Stanley first told us of his intentions to marry Ingrid, we were thrilled. Both Naomi and I had known Ingrid for some time through her work at the *shul*. She was a lively and animated girl and certainly made our Stanley happy. They got engaged in November 1975 and were married on 28 March 1976. My heart was filled with pride as I saw him standing under the chupah with his bride, and I prayed that he would have health and happiness throughout his married life.

Our family expands

With my grandchildren, Ricky, Taryn and Justine.

Naomi and I are today the proud and grateful grandparents of three wonderful *einiklech* (grandchildren). The eldest is Justine. Her Hebrew name is Chinanit which means grace and charm, qualities she definitely possesses. When she was born on the 9 May 1979, Naomi and I nearly burst with joy. When I heard the good news, I couldn't wait to go and see her. She looked so small and vulnerable. I remembered when Stanley looked like that and I could not believe how quickly the years had passed.

Before Justine's birth, Stanley and Ingrid would spend most Shabbatot with us, but that became difficult once there was a baby. In order to have quality time with our family Naomi and I began to visit our son and his family every Friday afternoon. We have continued this ritual tea-time visit till today and I must say I thoroughly enjoy it as we spend time with Ingrid and the children catching up on the week's news.

Justine is now nineteen years old and a beautician in the making. She loves her art and is very skilled at it. I am not sure if I approve of all the modern fashions but Justine is a pretty young lady who is able to cope with this strange world of beauty and fashion. I used to love walking to *shul* with her and chatting about the *parsha* of the week. I was always amazed at the knowledge she had gained from her Yeshiva College teachers. Now that she has finished school and is creating a place for herself in the world, I can only stand by and watch her development with admiration.

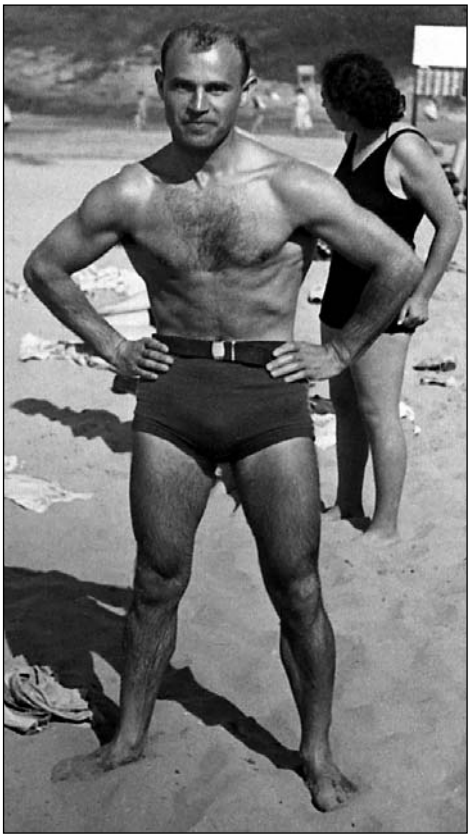
Ricky, our grandson, was born during the summer holidays on 5 January 1982 (10 Tevet 5742). Even though the day corresponded with the Fast of Tevet, our joy was immense. He was the first Seeff male in the new generation. Bernard subsequently had two sons, but in that January the excitement in the family was considerable. You can just imagine my delight when I heard his name at the *bris*; Avraham Yitzchak ben Sholem Ze'ev Yoseph, it was the exact name of my late brother Abe, as Stanley carries my father's name. I have been a *sandek* many times for many little boys in the family and the community, but I never felt the same joy as I did that day of Ricky's *bris*.

Our youngest grandchild was born 18 December 1989. We call her Taryn, but her Hebrew name is Yisraela after Ingrid's grandfather and Esther after Naomi's mother. She is a delightful little girl and has certainly brought sunshine into all our lives. She loves to visit our home and show off the skills that she has learnt at school. I have always encouraged children to not be shy and give of their talents so I am thrilled with her actions. I hope to be spared for many years to see her grow into a beautiful woman and a true daughter of Israel.

On holiday in Cape Town – 1998. From left: Taryn, Ricky, Justine.

My personal interests – from standing on my head to standing in Shul

Yoga



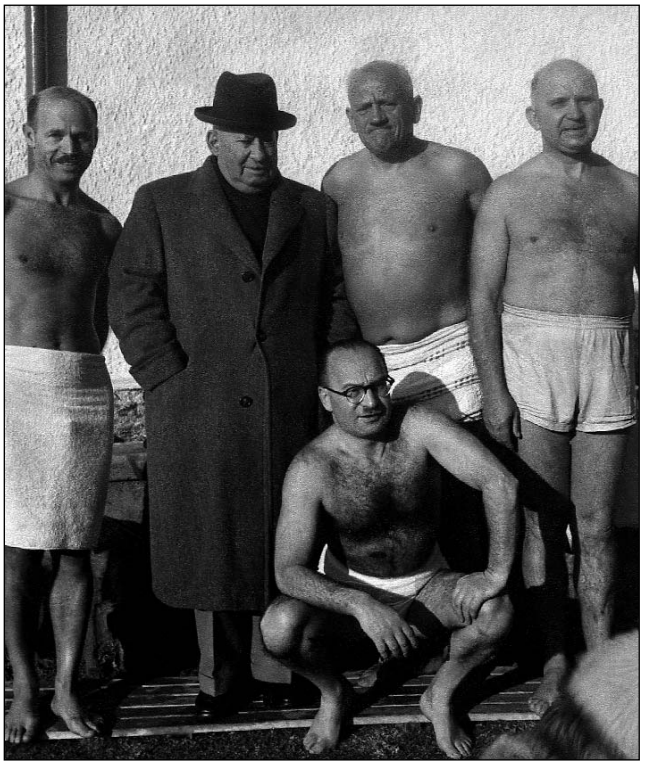
Yoga breathing

When I was about thirty, I was under an enormous amount of stress and I did not feel as if I was coping with my life. I became very ill with peritonitis and had to be hospitalized. Dr David Lurie looked after me and my recovery took a long time. At one point my life was in danger. Morris always says he prayed to the Almighty for my recovery and even offered some of his own years to save my life. I did finally make a full recovery, but never knew if his bargain was taken. His prayers however were greatly appreciated and I must confess my love for my brother is reciprocal.

At about the same time a man arrived in South Africa who had studied Hatha Yoga in India. In those days yoga was relatively unknown, but when I heard about its philosophy, I decided to attend a series of lectures. The basic approach revolves around good eating habits and physical exercise. I later discovered that this ideology is mentioned in the Talmud. The proponents of this idea were called *chachmei kedem* and the idea was practised by the Essenes. The lectures made me realise that I was in control of my body and my approach to life. For the next four years I attended yoga classes which I thoroughly enjoyed. At the same time I changed my lifestyle and eating habits. I became very conscious of my attitude towards life. I practised positive thinking and tried to reduce my stress levels. I was careful when I ate

and would refrain from doing so if I felt tense or angry. I stopped eating white bread and replaced it with wholewheat bread, and I did not mix starch foods with acid foods. I did not drink at meal-times as I discovered that liquids affected the body's natural digestive juices. If I did want to drink, I drank one hour before a meal and waited at least two hours after a meal. I also began to chew my food more slowly so as to appreciate the food as well as to allow proper digestion to take place. The breathing exercises were particularly interesting to me. By controlling my breathing I found I had more energy and a greater feeling of good health. When my teacher left I continued with my new routine and did yoga exercises at home on my own. After fifty years, I continue with the same regime and feel it has made an enormous difference to my life.

It is quite amazing how one series of lectures changed my life and my way of thinking. It has proven to me that good habits can be followed if one puts one's mind to it. Over the years, I have realised that many things in life are mind over matter. For the past fifty years I have swum every morning. Initially, I used to go to public swimming pools and in later years I swam in my neighbour's pool until I built one in my garden. I swim both in summer and winter and even though the water is very cold in winter I always come out of the pool feeling invigorated.



Swimming in winter.

I have always felt strongly about a healthy mind in a healthy body. I used to walk the dog every day, but since our last dog disappeared, I walk on my own. I pray to the Almighty to allow me to continue my daily practices for many years to come.

My communal participation

I was born into an observant Orthodox family. Jewish tradition has always been close to my heart and daily life. In Krakenowo, as a child, and in South Africa as an adult, I have learnt to understand the meaning of social and communal responsibility. My parents and two older brothers were exceptionally charitable and exemplary in their lives. Some of their kindness I have already mentioned in previous chapters. They were my mentors and role models. I have tried to set a similar example to my own son. I am proud of the manner in which he conducts himself and his communal duties. He, in turn, is setting a fine example to the next generation.

The urge to participate in communal work was part and parcel of my nature and upbringing. The essence of the *shtetl* was the importance of the community. Everyone was significant, no matter how large or small his or her contribution. In my adult years I decided to take responsibility and play a role in my own community. I chose to work with the Krakenowo Sick Benefit and Benevolent Society which connected me to my roots in Lithuania. I joined the Masonic Movement so as to play a role in a wider field, while my work for the Sydenham Highlands North Hebrew Congregation reflected my spiritual commitment.

The Krakenowo Sick Benefit and Benevolent Society

The *Anshei Achei Ezer D'Krakenowo* was founded in Cape Town in 1899. When our *landsleit* began moving up to Johannesburg it was decided to move the scope of the society to the Rand in 1901. The founding members in Johannesburg included Mane Jochelson, Isser Cohen, Louis Seeff, Isaac

Founder members of *Anshei Achei Ezer D'Krakenowo*

Salamon, Boruch Smith, David Rottanberg, Isaac Green, Ely Joselovitz, Avraham Bessarabia and Zelik Isaac Levin. These men and their families together with other members of the Society gave endless hours of their time, effort and money to help their *landsleit* in true *chavershaft* style. Isser Cohen and Zelig Isaac Levin, for instance, would sit for hours at the bedside of a sick *landsman* both day and night, bringing solace and much needed company.

The initial group of the Krakenowo Sick Benefit and Benevolent Society was small and there was no need for ledgers and other books of accounts. The first treasurer of the Society in the Transvaal, David Rottanberg, committed to memory the figures of income and expenditure. When a complicated transaction arose, he wrote the figures down on the starched cuffs of his shirt! By the time I took over the role of treasurer in the 1950s, however, careful and proper books had become standard practice.

In the preface to this Society's Diamond Jubilee Brochure (1961) I mentioned that our *landsmanschaft* was unique in many ways. Our *landsleit* retained their *shtetl* loyalties with zeal and vigour. Second and even third generation members continued to support and contribute toward the Society even though they had never seen or been to Krakenowo. Some office-bearers served for extremely long periods of time. Barney Levin, a son of Zelig Isaac, was honorary treasurer for just over thirty-six years! Natie Esra, Boruch Smith's son-in-law, served on

the committee for twenty-six years!

This Society was perhaps not as big as some other *landsmanshaften*, but it was one of the pioneers and one of the most dedicated in its work. In 1910 the Society founded a *Gemilus Chesed* for loans. Mr S Flaum was the organiser and first chairman of that committee. As no funds were readily available, a hundred shares of one pound each were issued and a capital of one hundred pounds was raised. To swell the coffers, dances and other functions were held at the old Wanderers Hall near the Johannesburg station.

The Society first held High Festival services in 1908 after a Sefer Torah, written by our beloved scribe Reb Hirshe der Sofer, was imported from Krakenowo. The *baal tefilah* of the first *minyanim* was Mr Hirshe Hirshowitz, father of the mining magnate A S Hersov. The Society's Torah was used for many years by the Jeppe Shul and when the Society wanted it back, the *shul* committee would not release it. After much negotiation the matter was settled and the Torah was moved to the Sydenham Highlands North Shul for about fifteen years. In recent years, the Torah was bought by my brother Morris who gave it to his son Bernard. The *eitz chaim* (wooden handles) were broken at that stage. Morris spent a lot of time on a lathe carving out a new set. The Torah is now being used in the West Street *Shul* in Houghton.

During World War I, the Krakenowo Society established its own war fund in aid of Jews who had been banished to Russia and later for the assistance of those who returned to the almost ruined town of Krakenowo. After the war the influx of immigrants resumed and money was needed for the needy and the sick.

My family was closely associated with the Society; in fact my uncle Louis Seeff was one of the founding members of the Johannesburg organisation. Issy Seeff, his son, served as treasurer for some time. By 1934 the second generation began to take leadership in the Society. It was at that stage that I became a member. I too served on the committee as treasurer and chairman. At the time of the Diamond Jubilee I was the Honorary Treasurer, Jack Goldman was the Chairman, Woolf Cohen the Vice-Chairman, Barney Levin the Secretary, while Ray Smith and Nathan Esrachowitz were committee members.

For many years meetings were convened at my home, and my wife Naomi always made everyone feel welcome. We would organise fund-raising campaigns as well as decide where funds should be channelled and we retained a special relationship with our *landsleit*. Money was raised by having dances, subscriptions, as well as donations. At the time of the Krakenowo Society's

Krakenowo society founders.

Executive committee members at the time of the Golden Jubilee.
STANDING(from left):Dr Harvey Cohen, Willie Cohen, Louis Kotzen, Jack Perilly, Morris Bass, Barney Lax. FRONT ROW: Nathan Ezra, Ike Broide, Jack Goldman (chairman), Woolf Cohen, Sydney Seeff, Barney Levin.

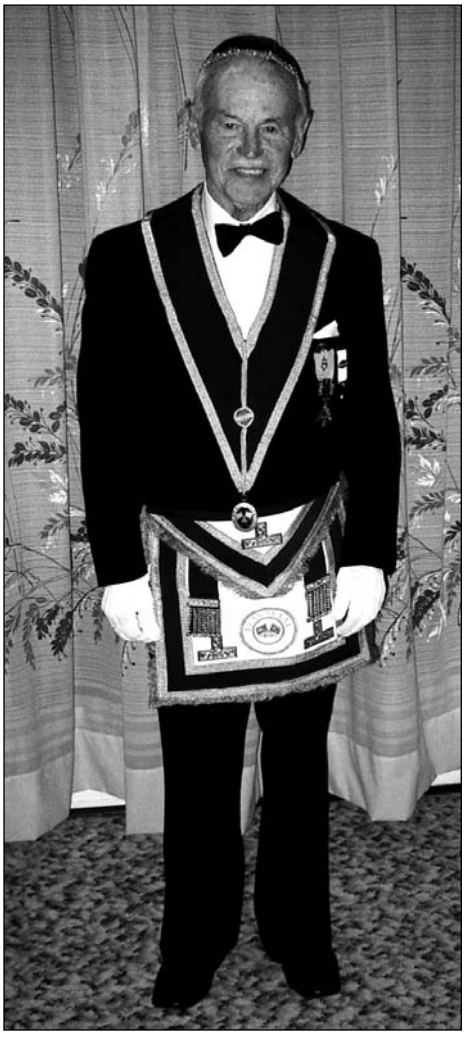
Diamond Jubilee a grand sum of thirty-five thousand pounds had been lent out to needy cases. Through the years, we were also in continual contact with our friends and family across the world in countries such as North and South America, England, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Israel and even Cuba.

Till the present, the Society has continued to help those in need, both *landsleit* and local needy charities, and it still retains its association with the Jewish Board of Deputies. Although the activities of the Society have virtually ceased, the remaining funds have been used for presentations which have been given to members' children and grandchildren on the occasion of their barmitzvahs and weddings. Jewish theology speaks about *zechut avot* which is a difficult concept to translate. Basically it refers to the "merit of parents" affecting the life of their offspring. Naomi and I are extremely grateful to *Hashem* that our son Stanley and his wife Ingrid are so devoted to communal charities and numerous Jewish causes. Krakenowo values have obviously rubbed off on the next generation.

Committee for the Diamond Jubilee. BACK ROW (from left): Issac Gel, Jack Perilly, Pearl Tocker, Ted Tocker, Blume Levin, Dora Seeff, Morris Seeff. SECOND ROW: Barney Lax, Minnie Gel, Florence Perilly, Naomi Seeff, Fanny Goldman, Annie Galgut, Esther Tocker and Harvey Cohen THIRD ROW: Nathan Esrachowitz, Hilda Lax, Sydney Seeff, Jack Goldman (chairman), Woolf Cohen, Ray Smith, Barney Levin. FRONT ROW: Cherry Gel, Stanley Seeff, Laz Tocker.

Freemasonry

Freemasonry is the largest and oldest of the world's fraternal organisations. It aims to foster brotherhood and unity among all nations, irrespective of race, colour religion or social status. Masons try to promote a "morality in which all men agree, i.e. to be good and true men." No particular denomination is supported, but all members must believe in one G-d. The symbols and rituals of the group are based on the tools and practices of the building profession. Many of the rituals remain secret to all except members. Men must apply to join, usually through a friend who is already a member.



Ready for Lodge

I was introduced to the Doornfontein Lodge in 1949 by a gentleman who worked for the War Supply Requisites. This lodge follows the English Constitution and gave me opportunities to help my fellow brethren. Once I was accepted by the masons, I started out as an apprentice and worked my way up by degrees. Each degree teaches a moral lesson. To earn the degree, a mason must learn the lessons and participate in the ceremony that illustrates them. After the third degree, I completed my apprenticeship and was accepted as an official mason. From that time I was entitled to take on different roles. Over a period of about ten years I progressed through

Freemasonry Regalia

these various stages and eventually, in 1963-64, became a master. At that stage I was entitled to become part of the Royal Arch Lodge and later attained the highest honour of becoming the "Z". In the District Grand Lodge I had the title PDG standard sword bearer.

I have attended lodge meetings for the past forty-eight years and have really benefited from my activities with these very dedicated men. When the freemasons built a lovely new building in Parktown, our lodge meetings were held there. Unfortunately it became more difficult for me to get to the evening meetings and I attended fewer and fewer meetings as time went by.

The Sydenham-Highlands North Hebrew Congregation

I am often asked: "You have held many honorary positions at your *shul*. Tell me what is it like to be Chairman or President of a Jewish community?"

My answer is usually: "It is a full time job!" Next to the rabbi of the congregation, the Honorary Officers are the most heavily involved in the daily running of the centre of our spiritual life, both financially and socially.

The Sydenham Highlands North Shul.

The late Professor Solomon Rappaport wrote a number of articles on the significance of the synagogue. He wrote that the synagogue has, for many generations, been the lifeblood of the Jewish people, the pulsating centre of Jewish existence."It was the power house from which emanated every impulse in the religious, cultural and social life of *Am Yisrae*l. It was the House of Prayer, the House of Learning and the House of Meeting. Within its walls Jews gathered to pray and study, to practise charity, to rejoice and to mourn. The modern Jewish house of worship arose out of the *Mishkan* built by Moshe Rabbeinu when the Israelites left Egypt. The two Jerusalem Temples which were destroyed on Tisha B'Av had been modelled on the *Mishkan*. The synagogue is called a *Mikdash Me'at*, a sanctuary in miniature. If you are not a committed, regular congregant you may not ever come to realise why our religion insists on communal worship".

The Jewish Halacha or law, commands us to pray three times a day at *Shacharit, Mincha* and *Ma'ariv*. Under certain circumstances you may pray in the privacy of your home, factory or office. The sages, however, taught us that he who has a synagogue in his community and does not worship together with a *minyan* of ten adult Jews is considered a 'bad neighbour'. The reason for this

ruling is that by absenting himself from the *shul* he is displaying a lack of interest in the welfare of the community in which he lives. A man, they said, who prays only at home will be inclined to pray for himself. One who comes regularly to make up a *minyan* will inevitably become aware of the needs of his neighbours. He will not pray selfishly and he will not act selfishly. If you look closely at our *siddur* you will notice something very interesting. Most, if not all of our *tefillot* are in the plural: "Heal us O G-d, hear our voice, forgive our sins!"

When Naomi and I bought our house in Roslin Street, Sydenham we needed to join a *shul*. Sydenham Highlands North was at that time a fledgling *shul*, but it was within walking distance to us, so we joined in early 1951. In fact by December of that same year I was co-opted to the council. Since then I have served as Treasurer and Trustee as well as President for the periods 1963/4, 1971/2, 1975/6. I was very proud to receive the distinction of Honorary Life Member of Council in 1991.

In 1955 Naomi and I moved to a new house in Percelia which was still within walking distance to the *shul*. Over the years I have been a regular member of the Sydenham Highlands North Hebrew Congregation. When I first joined, services were held in the old *shul* hall which soon became too small and it was clear that the hall was totally inadequate for the growing community's needs. I was very involved in the planning and building of the new *shul* which is an imposing structure and the largest synagogue in the southern hemisphere. There was much debate about the size of the women's section and I had a lot of opposition to making the women's section bigger: I won the argument and we can now accommodate fifty to sixty additional women. The building was finally completed in 1955 and we arranged a very impressive opening ceremony. The late Dr Donges, who was at that time Minister of Finance, was kind enough to unveil the inauguration plaque. My family donated the *bimah* in memory of my parents Sholem Ze'ev and Chana Sora Seeff. Our company Sydmore was involved in the construction of the ornamental menorah on the front wall.

Nina's husband, Beni Kaplan, donated a Torah on behalf of his brothers-in-law, Abe, Morris and myself for the kindness we had shown him in the past. The Torah was presented to the shul in memory of our parents and our late brother Harry, and our sister Rivel and her family who were killed in Lithuania. We had

Morris, Abe and Sydney with the Torah.

a *siyum haTorah* on 18 March of that year. The service was conducted by Rev O Altshuler, with the choir under the direction of Louis Krasner. Rev Kaminer completed the writing of the Torah. After the *siyum*, Rabbi J Kahaneman, the Ponevez Rav who was in South Africa at the time, delivered an address in Yiddish. This Torah is still housed in the *shul's Aron Kodesh*.

When my oldest brother, Abe (Abraham Isaac), died he left money for communal purposes. In 1984 the old hall was demolished and rebuilt. The main hall was dedicated in his name. We also dedicated new playschool classrooms in memory of my late sister Rodel Resnick. An additional hall was built on the upper storey which served the community in case extra space was needed. A conference room in memory of Harry Seeff was incorporated into this upstairs area.

A day to remember

Erev Yom Kippur is my father's *yohrtzeit*. Sholom Ze'ev had passed away on this day in 1947. Precisely fifty years later it was a day which none of us will ever forget. On the eve of Yom Kippur 1997, some two months after celebrating my eighty-eighth birthday, I was on the point of leaving home to go and daven at the Sydenham Highlands North Shul.

On this particular day I woke up at dawn, dressed and prepared to go to *shul*. The time was 5.30 am and all seemed tranquil and silent. As usual I left the house through the kitchen door. I moved quickly and silently so as not to disturb Naomi or our domestic staff. I locked the kitchen door behind me and placed the key on the inside sill where nobody from the outside could see it. I walked towards my car and prepared to open the driver's door. Suddenly and noiselessly a pair of powerful black hands reached over my head from behind. They covered my nose and mouth. An armed and experienced gang had somehow entered my garage and had ambushed me. A well-planned and merciless robbery of our household had begun!

My attempt to call out to my loyal driver Lazarus was brutally prevented. My necktie was ripped off and I gagged and choked. Unbeknown to me, Lazarus had already heard strange noises and had come running out of his room to investigate. He was immediately stopped in his tracks by one of the robbers who pressed a revolver to his head.

The next phase of the assault involved our maid Mavis. She was forced at gunpoint to open the kitchen door. Four men rushed passed me and switched on the lights in the house. The light woke Naomi who called out, "Sydney, why are home from *shul* so early?" With that the four robbers burst into our bedroom. They accosted Naomi and yanked off all the jewellery she was wearing. They pointed the gun to her head and demanded to know where the safe and money were kept. Naomi tried to reason with them, but to no avail. By that stage Mavis and I were forced to join Naomi in the bedroom. The robbers hurled abuse and threats at us all.

During all the panic that ensued in the room, Mavis managed to shift herself towards the panic switch which connected our house to a security company. The robbers did not notice her actions. As she pressed the button the high pitched screeching of the alarm sounded. The robbers realised what she had done and one of them delivered a hard kick under her jaw. Then they gathered their loot and fled back to the kitchen and out the door. When I managed to get up from the bed I rushed to the door and locked us in the room in case the men should return. I checked to see if Naomi was all right and saw that she appeared to be reasonably calm. After a short while I carefully opened the door to see if the coast was clear. By that stage the security company had arrived at our house and I began to relax and let them handle the situation.

Meanwhile a number of people from *shul* missed my attendance and came to the house to see what had caused my absence. The whole episode might have taken twenty minutes and yet during that time it felt like a lifetime. When I thought about it later I couldn't help feeling that we had all been saved in the merit of my father. I had, after all, woken up to go to shul to say *kaddish* for him. My father had looked after me while he was alive, and fifty years later I felt his protection again.

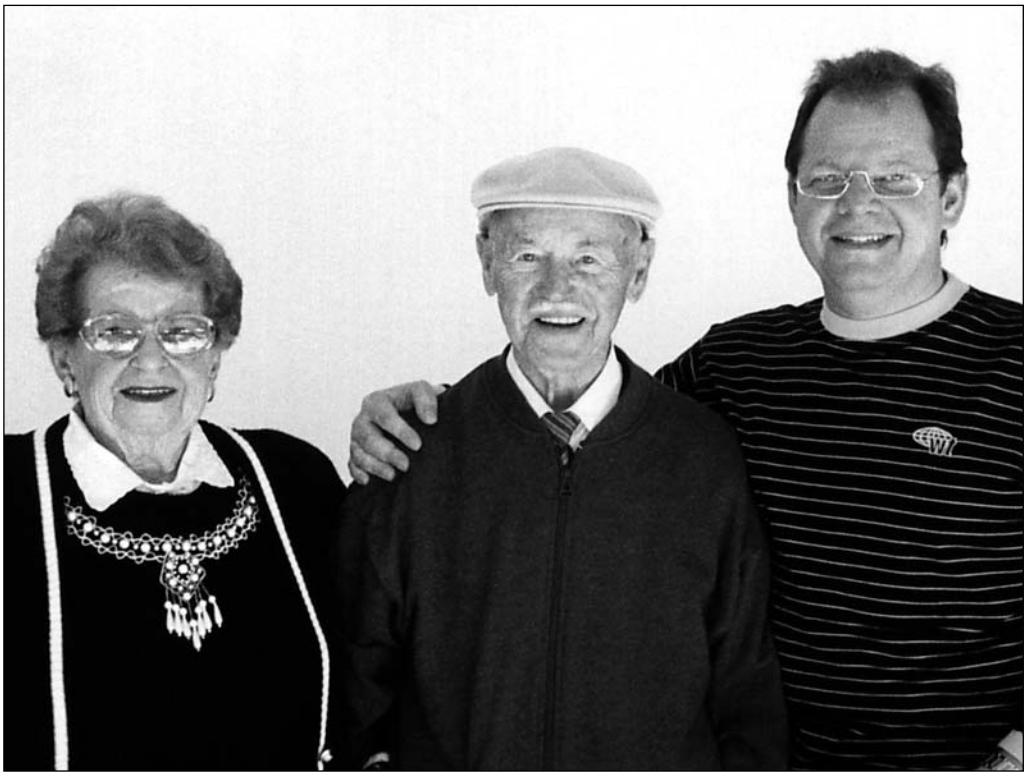
My family recollects

Naomi, my wife

Sydney has always been a very good husband and provider. He is a generous man, not only financially but with kindness as well. He was a considerate son, always concerned about his parents' welfare. He showed equal care for my mother. When my brother Effie got married, Sydney did not hesitate to take my mother Esther Gordon into our home. He always made her feel welcome. When we went on holiday there was never a discussion about my mother joining us; she was part of the family and we all went together. My mother lived with us for twenty seven years until her death on 1 August 1979, corresponding to 8 Av 5739.

Naomi, Stanley and I.

Like all married couples, we have had our differences. One of our ongoing discussions has always been over his

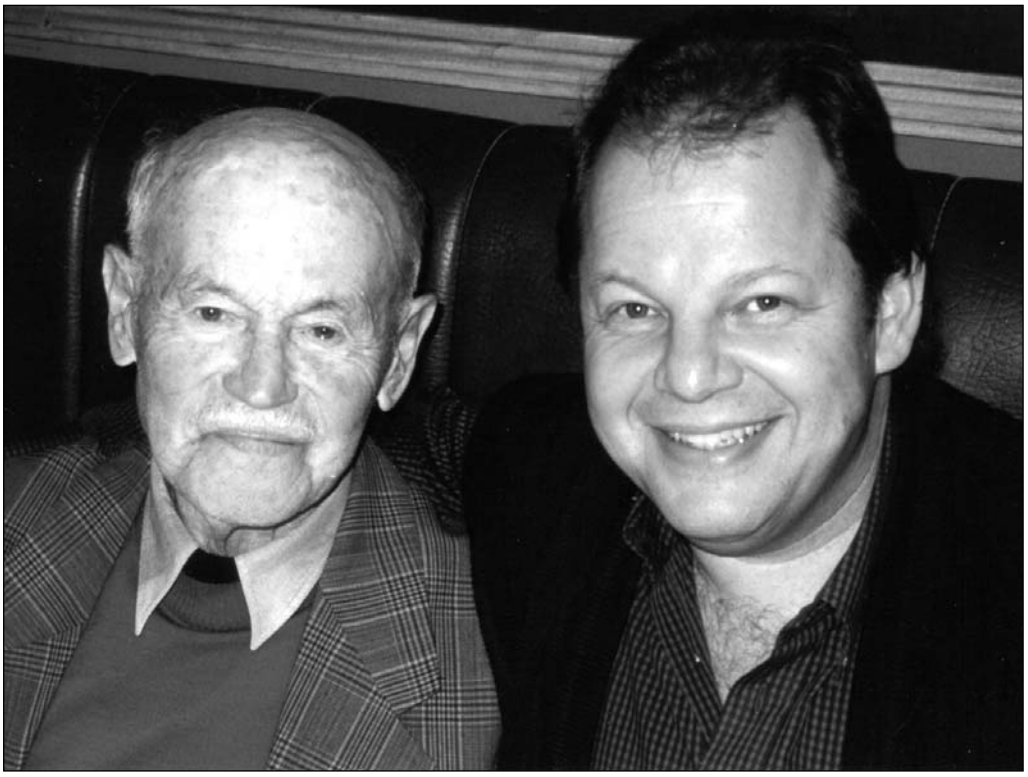


On my 89th birthday with Naomi and Stanley.

clothing and what he should wear. To appease me, he will often agree with me, but sometime later I see he is wearing exactly what he started with. I guess you can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Sydney has always been interested in healthy food and healthy living. He is an early riser and usually wakes up at about 5.30 am. He does his yoga exercises and then goes to *shul*. When he comes home, he brings me a cup of coffee while I am still in bed. If my sister Sally sleeps over at our house, she too gets a cup of coffee. Sydney performs this activity with little fuss or bother. He is a very matter of fact person, not given to frills or fancy.

Optimism has always been one of Sydney's greatest strengths. No matter what the situation, he has the ability to see the positive aspect and believes wholeheartedly that each trial or failure that life presents can be used as a positive lesson. My years with him have been truly blessed.



Stanley and I – June 1998.

Stanley's personal insight

Over the years I have had three very special relationships with my father, on different levels, but through all of them he has always been a true mensch and mentor and a man from whom we can all learn a lot.

The first	My father – a parent and teacher
The second	My father – an employer and teacher
The third	My father – a philanthropist and teacher

Parent and Teacher

When I was born my Dad was 43 and my Mom 28 and I still remember some of the time we spent living in Sydenham and then, when I was three, moving to Percelia, where my parents still live today.

This move was probably made out of necessity to accommodate the four of

Flash, our Alsatian.

us, the fourth being Granny Esther, my mother's mother, who lived with them for 27 years, until she passed away. Not many sons-in-law would have been able to cope with a live-in mother-in-law, but my father is the exception. His strong belief in the teachings of the Torah and, in particular one of the ten commandments, to honour one's parents, was certainly practiced. I am told that the respect and love he had for his parents, whom I never knew, was without limitations, but the way he speaks about them is testament to this fact. On reflection, I'm not sure of the reason for moving into Percelia as his family all lived South-West of us and, knowing how close they were, I would have thought that my father would have wanted to be nearer to them. Perhaps it had something to do with his special affinity to the Sydenham Highlands North Shul, which has become his sanctuary where he gained a tremendous insight into Halacha, spending many years on the executive, where he still serves today.

As a small child he took me along to visit the building site of the Shul, where he explained the roof structure (which was a first for the times) to me. Whilst there, I would run amongst the builders' material and watch the workers. Therefore, I too am a real foundation member of the Shul. Once completed, he used to carry me there on his shoulders on Shabbat mornings. This love for the Shul has continued for decades and he has always taken an active role, firstly in the vision of the new Shul and later in the development of the Community Centre which houses three halls, the larger of which was named after his eldest brother Abe.

My Dad has always supported me, but seldom had time to do homework or normal father/son things. Those were left up to my Mom. But Sundays were, so to speak, our time together when we would generally go from house to house visiting uncles, aunts and cousins. Before doing this though, we would stop at the café and buy sweets and chocolates to leave at each destination. Uncle Abe, who was childless, would do the same. I looked forward to spending this time with my father as his working week was always taken up with the factory and he worked late on most nights, scheming on how to best build the business.

He had few hobbies except for chess, which he purposely lost so that his opponents could win, and the irregular bowls tournaments he played in for the masonic lodge competitions. As he never practiced, he was not at all good, often bowling with the wrong bias, but this was his "time out" and he really enjoyed it. Shul, as I mentioned earlier, was his other extramural activity.

Through the years, he has taught me right from wrong, how to treat others and I have a lot to be grateful to him for.

Celebrating my 80th birthday with Bernard, Stanley and Rabbi Goldman.

Family photo taken at our golden anniversary.
BACK ROW (from left): Ingrid, Stanley, Sydney, Naomi, Ricky, Justine.
FRONT ROW: Taryn.

Employer and Teacher

My father has always been passionately involved in the business "Symo" which he and Morris started and developed from meager beginnings in Johannesburg, as well as other less demanding business activities. He has never told me what drives him, but until a few years ago, he worked an eighteen hour day. Perhaps, knowing what it was to go without has been his motivation and not wanting to see his family in the same terrible situation that his parents and siblings endured when he was growing up. He has documented details on how difficult things were for him and his family in this book. My Dad is a very secretive and private person and a lot of what he does is done on a "need-to-know" basis.

I thoroughly enjoyed visiting him at work in Sievewright Avenue, Doornfontein, where I was given pencils and paperclips by all the nice staff there, but I was always afraid of being caught with all these goodies by my

father's boss - Mr Lipron. Only years later, did I discover that Sydney and Morris owned the business and in fact, Mr Lipron worked for them. Even after they built and moved into a new factory and office premises in Elandsfontein, close to Jan Smuts airport, I was unaware that the business was theirs. Here too, I was wary of the other bosses, like Cecil and Henry Bloom who would not allow me to take anything out of the store, unless authorised by them.

The truth be told, I was quite mischievous in those days and even after unintentionally destroying a large rack of door frames by tying a rope from a stand to a truck, I was only given an explanation of all the damage that I had caused by way of a brush being moved along a basin in the bathroom at home. Of course, I thought that I was going to get my bottom spanked, but this didn't occur as it was not his way.

I joined Symo in 1971 and over the past 25 years have been privileged to work with my Dad and Uncle Morris, as well as Uncle Abe in my early years there. Looking back, I can still see the family comprising of Uncle Morris, Uncle Abe, Aunt Rochel, Cousin Charlie, later Jack Shapiro and myself sitting in Symo's dining room having lunch together – what an experience. I remem-

Our family on holiday in Israel – 1996
From left: Ricky, Sydney, Taryn, Justine, Naomi

ber the very many exciting and good times, as well as the difficult ones and recall those occasions when times were really tough with little business coming in and the banks and/or shippers pressurising them to reduce the company's borrowings.

Outwardly my Dad never seemed to worry, but there were times when he sat alone late into the night struggling with uncomfortable decisions on how best to resolve difficult situations. Throughout those times, he never lost hope and we managed with his guidance, and sometimes serious disagreements with others, to overcome the problems. What is vivid in my mind are the occasions when I discussed deals with him or asked for his opinion. He always encouraged me to accept challenges. This was the way he, together with Uncle Morris, expanded and grew the business, ultimately achieving what they have. He is a visionary and has an uncanny knack of being able to foresee the outcome of many a situation. In most cases, when decisions were needed, he was correct even when it was almost impossible to have known the outcome. Whilst he listens to most opinions and recommendations that are put before him, he ultimately does what he believes to be right which, no doubt, has caused a lot of discontent with others. He is still active and leaves us all amazed at his vitality even in his late 80's. Only last week we climbed over the roofs at our factory to inspect their condition. He was the first up and down, warning us to watch our step and not to err on the side of caution.

Our staff have a special love for the brothers Seeff and refer to them as Mr S. and Mr M. I know that our black staff have special names for them. Sydney is called "Majasana", which means "jacket", because of his trademark white dust coat that he always wore around the factory. Morris' name is Makhulu's Kop, which means "Big Brain", because of all his inventions.

Lately, Dad spends a lot more time walking around the factory, letting me know of issues which he feels need attention or are of concern to him. He has recently started taking it a little easier, but loves to be involved in all major business decisions and we have to hold him back from starting new ventures.

There have been times when I have been introduced to someone, to be told that this person will be starting with us as he is "an expert". My Dad is most perceptive and over the years he has indeed employed many good and loyal staff on this basis – he generally sees the potential in people. I have bumped into so many individuals who are successful in their own businesses today who tell me how, if not for the Seeffs, they would not be in the positions they

are in. He has taught me how to treat friend and foe, to understand that there are three sides to every story, to think 10 times and act once. In the last 25 years I have seen him lose his temper perhaps only twice and I can assure you, you didn't want to be around when that happened, but it died down as quickly as it erupted. His philosophy of being honest and morally upstanding has repeatedly proven to be the right way to conduct oneself and, even if it sometimes appeared to have worked against him, he never deviated from this approach. I have yet to meet anyone who does not respect and admire him in business and I know full well that this person will never be found.

He has been a true inspiration to all of us and we will endeavour to continue with his good work and to try to emulate him as best as we can.

Philanthropist and Teacher

I know that only Hashem and those who my Dad touches in his own unique way, know another side of Sydney Seeff. The way he conducts himself when it comes to Tzedaka, performing acts of kindness in the most modest way possible is commendable. He understands that the highest form of charity occurs when the recipient and donor do not know one another and he goes to great lengths to achieve this. I am led to believe on good authority that he delivers envelopes with Tzedaka before Shabbat each week to many needy people in our community.

He is known throughout the world for his acts of generosity and I can't count the hours that he has spent meeting with Rabbonim and *Misholochim* and others, to listen to their causes. They have always left with a donation of sorts.

Besides becoming a Grand Master at Lodge, which took him years of hard work and a tremendous sacrifice in time to achieve, he has spent many hundreds of hours at the Sydenham Highlands North Shul not only in an advisory capacity, but also in fund raising to ensure its growth. He is always available to participate in leading the *davening* or just walking around, seeing to it that visitors are well received. I've been with him when he has gotten up out of his seat to give his *siddur* or *chumash* to someone who does not have one or the other. I have sometimes been annoyed with him when he has done this as he would then have to go out to find a replacement for himself, but he would then rightly tell me to relax and not get agitated over something so irrelevant.

I recall the times when he was President at the Shul and walked for miles on Shabbat mornings after the service, to address barmitzvah boys and their fami-

lies at their homes, coming home late and being met by a very irate family, but never responding angrily. In case you don't know, my father is the most hard-headed person I have ever met and I don't think that I have ever seen him change his mind once he has decided on something, even if he says that he would.

My father, Sydney, is a very unique and special man – one in a million. A grandfather who dearly loves each of his three grandchildren and every moment he is able to spend with them.

Friday afternoons have become family time when he appears at our front door with fresh fruit (like he and I delivered sweets years before), to have a L'chaim with us before going home to get ready for Shul.

We have spent some wonderful times together celebrating many milestones and with Hashem's blessings, may he live to be a hundred and twenty.

Sydney, my father-in-law

I met Sydney in 1972, when I began working at the Sydenham Highlands North Shul as a junior secretary. Little did we know that four years later I would become his daughter-in-law. Our mutual love of the *shul* has remained a common bond in our relationship as we are both enmeshed in its fabric.

Once I married Stan and became a member of the Seeff family, I continued to work at the shul. Sydney and Naomi welcomed me very warmly into their lives and before we had children, Stan and I would spend every Shabbat in their home. When the children were born it became more difficult to walk the distance with the young children and so Sydney and Naomi came to our home every Friday afternoon instead.

On meeting Sydney one cannot but notice his humility and generosity of spirit. He loves to give and asks nothing in return. He also has a fierce family devotion. I never met his parents, but from what I have heard he was a wonderful and dedicated son. His siblings also played an important role in his life and the passing of Rodel and Nina, the two sisters whom I knew, affected him deeply, as did the passing of his nephews Charlie and Jeremy.

Sydney has taught me valuable lessons about life over the years I have been privileged to know him. His faith and positive outlook, no matter what the situation, make him a truly remarkable person. He is a *mentsch*, a gentleman and a gentle man.

Sydney, our grandfather

Justine

My earliest recollections of my grandfather revolve around his weekly visits on a Friday afternoon. He would arrive, humming a tune, arms laden with boxes of fruit and wash his hands before greeting anyone. I am the first-born grandchild and I imagine that my arrival must have caused quite a stir. My grandpa has always shown me much love and as the years have passed he shows more and more affection.

Many of my memories of my grandpa centre around his places of interest. I loved going to his office at the factory because the office staff fussed over me and there was always a supply of toffees and biscuits. Lunch in the executive dining room with Sydney and Morris was usually entertaining as they seemed to use the opportunity to air their views, sometimes becoming quite heated in the process. I was also fascinated how my grandpa would eat his food. He is very fastidious in his habits and I watched him carefully make a sandwich and then cut it up into smaller pieces. He has always told me how and what I should eat and the necessity of eating slowly. Hard as I try I just don't seem to be able to chew my food for as long as he does.

My grandpa loves to travel, especially to Israel. When the Gulf War broke out many tourists left Israel as soon as they could. Sydney on the other hand couldn't wait to get there and flew in as soon as it could be arranged. He was issued with his gas mask in the hotel and was quite content to sit in the sealed off room. His faith in Israel is unwavering and he had absolutely no fear about the outcome of the war. After each trip my siblings and I are brought gifts and I will treasure them always.

As a little girl I used to attempt playing chess with my grandpa, but was never very good. Sydney never berated or shouted at me, but would sit patiently and guide me. My most recent memory of having fun with my grandpa was at a family wedding in January this year. The Macarena dance craze was all the rage and as soon as the music began there was a rush to the dance floor. Sydney was curious and so I taught him what to do. It was such fun dancing with him as he

was beaming with his achievement. We later twirled around together dancing the Lambada. I was amazed at his energy. At my grandpa's eightieth birthday party I was privileged to be able to make a speech to him:

Exactly eighty years ago today
In a village very far away,
A son was born to Chana and Sholem Ze'ev
And to him the name Zundel they gave.

Their life was hard and roubles were few,
So Zundel journeyed to a country new.
A farmer in the Free State he became
But I'm pleased he never stayed in **that** game.

He moved to the big city in 1932
To join Uncle Morris who was there too.
They formed a business working in steel
A trade for which they had an obvious feel.

The rest is history to most people here
Because the man I speak of is most dear.
He is my Grandpa Sydney, my mentor, my friend,
A man so strong-willed, he does not bend.
Speaking of bending, I'm sure you all know
That he swims everyday, sunshine or snow.
After which he stretches and stands on his head,
Certainly not a man who likes to laze in his bed!

A man of such discipline one will rarely find
But he's also a person both loving and kind.
His knowledge of Judaism and health is vast,
And his vigour often has young men aghast.

In spite of his age, he works a long day
And in arguments is sure to get his own way.
When it comes to charity or those in need of more,
He has never turned the wanting away from his door.

Granny and Grandpa make a wonderful pair
As long as she doesn't tell him what to wear.
We're all so glad about the recovery she's made
But Granny will be happy when bowls can be played.
We are all gathered here at his party tonight,
To pay tribute to Sydney, a man of might.
We hope and pray that till one hundred and twenty,
He will know only good health and *nachas* plenty.
Ricky and I are indeed blessed and proud
To have a grandpa like you, who stands out in a crowd.
And the things you have taught us to say and do,
We will always cherish as a gift from you.

Before I take my leave of the mike,
I ask you, relatives and friends alike
To rise, charge your glasses and drink a *l'chaim*
To my Grandpa, to whom I dedicate this rhyme.

Ricky

My recollections of my grandpa are associated with his health, nutrition and religious beliefs. He is an ace yogi and still stands on his head every day. He asks if I can do it , but I could never compete with him! He is able to roll his stomach which is fascinating to watch, but impossible to copy. As for his strength; this was brought home to me when I wanted to demonstrate my newly learned Kung Fu. In two ticks he had me in a lock from which I couldn't escape. He always tells me about the importance of being relaxed and stress free. He certainly practises what he preaches and he is the epitome of a calm and relaxed person.

Sitting in *shul* with my grandpa is a special experience. He has such strong beliefs and integrity as far as religion is concerned and is dedicated in his prayer. He has this very special *tallis* bag. It was sent to him by his late sister Rivel from Krakenowo and is his pride and joy. He loves talking about his sister who was

killed in Lithuania and has a deep-seated love for his whole family. Celebrating Pesach with my grandpa is always a special occasion. I am able to read Hebrew reasonably well, but find it difficult to keep up with my grandpa. There is also a particular song that we all sing at our family seders and that is *Der Tzikele* which is *Chad Gadya* in Yiddish (see Appendix V). I am amazed at his ability to remember the words of a song he sang as a child. My cousin Joyce and my mother have now recorded these words so that we can all participate in the singing.

The most precious lesson I have learnt from my grandpa is his ability to always look at things from a positive point of view. I don't think I have ever heard him speak ill of anyone. I hope I can emulate this special man and be a grandson he can be proud of.

Taryn

I am the youngest of Sydney's grandchildren. My pending arrival was announced publicly by my grandpa on his eightieth birthday, so in a sense I participated in that special celebration.

Grandpa loves animals, especially dogs. When my dad was young they had a dog called Flash. Grandpa still talks about his beautiful and clever Alsatian. By the time I came along there was a different dog whose name was Curly. I used to go walking the dog with grandpa, although it was more like a run than a walk. My grandpa was very upset when Curly disappeared; we think he was run over somewhere as he never came back.

I also enjoy going to my grandparents' home and having bagels and cheese. For some reason that kind of sandwich tastes much better in their home than in ours!

I enjoy making birthday cards for my grandparents and especially colouring them in. Grandpa is always so appreciative of the things I make for him. He always encourages me to play on his piano and is happy to listen to one of the choral verses we learn at school. Like my siblings, grandpa often asks me questions about the *parsha* of the week.

One thing I have learnt from my grandpa is to never be afraid to try something new and I can still picture him wearing his snorkel on our visit to Eilat in 1996.

EPILOGUE

I am blessed

Naomi and Sydney at their Golden Anniversary.

In Hebrew we have a famous saying: "*Acharon Acharon Chaviv*", the last is the most beloved. This applies to the final portion of this volume. In writing this section I am conscious of *Hashem's* manifold mercies and care for his mortal creatures. I have reached the ripe old age of eighty-nine and still feel fit and well, *baruch Hashem*. I am still able to go to work regularly and I enjoy many daily activities such as chess, yoga, swimming, reading, communal work and, of course, spending time with my wife and family.

I am a very lucky man to have a wife such as Naomi. She has always stood by me and given me much support. She has allowed me time and freedom to pursue my personal goals and I am deeply grateful for her understanding. Our son, Stanley, has been the light of my life and I have had a lot of pleasure watching him grow up and see him adopt for himself, the ethics and values upon

which I place so much emphasis. Ingrid, his wife, has been like a daughter to Naomi and me. She too shows a keen interest in Jewish values and has been a wonderful example of Jewish mother. With *Hashem's* help, my grandchildren are growing up as cultured and observant Jews. How my own grandparents and parents would have loved them!

I wish to pass on my philosophy to my descendants. I have told them where they come from and they must make their own decisions as to where they will go. However, I hope that certain belief systems will be passed on to them.

My beliefs

1. If anyone were to ask me to sum up in one word who I am and what guides Jewish life and the life of all Jewish generations – past, present and future – I would say the "Torah". The world's wisdom has expressed itself in technology, warfare, art, drama, movies and so on. Jewish wisdom has expressed itself in a different way: the *halacha* (path), the ethics of compassion, the giving of charity, the words of the prophets. All these are included in the concept of Torah. Let us look at the term *mitzvot*. To a young child this means a good deed. Jewish parents, including my own, have always had great respect for education and have taught their children to do good deeds, to share, to be kind, to help the needy, to assist the widow and orphan and to care for the sick. The exact translation of *mitzvah*, however, is commandment. My parents also taught me to obey commandments; not to steal or act dishonestly, to give charity and to obey parents, to love our fellowman, our neighbours and "the stranger who is within thy gate" (Vayikra 19:34).
2. At the deepest level *mitzvot* means values; moral values decreed by the Almighty. I firmly believe that Judaism is not just blind obedience to ancient commands which can be dispensed with by modern society. The trouble with our sophisticated, permissive, so-called "modern" society is that we have lost divine values: "Torah from Sinai". Divorce, intermarriage, pornography, homosexuality and similar afflictions are a direct result of a lost adherence to values given by the Almighty to the People of

Israel over three thousand years ago.

3. *Am Yisrael chai*, the Jewish People is alive and well, is not a mere phrase; it is a profound and eternal truth, and is in fact *Hashem's* holy promise to our patriarchs, prophets and sages. I am deeply honoured, not only to have-witnessed the establishment of the State of Israel, but to see the country grow and develop. We are taught that the Almighty will answer our prayers and help us, but we need to make an effort as well. The Jewish people and the Zionists in particular made an enormous effort. My family have always been Zionists. As a child, putting the odd cent into the Blue Box, I never dreamed that in later years I would be able to freely visit Zion, and see *Midinat Yisrael*, the State of Israel.
4. In all my communal and personal endeavours I have always tried to uphold certain Jewish values: to be caring to Jew and non-Jew alike. That is why I joined the Freemasons, worked for the Sydenham-Highlands North Shul as well as the Krakenowo Society and related Jewish causes. Today my son and his wife continue in this tradition and are deeply involved with the United Communal Fund, and the Israel United Appeal and *shul* activities. Our company Symo Corporation, as well as our other businesses like Power Steel and Morlite, have always looked after the workers; men and women of all religions, cultures and colours. We set up a non-contributory provident fund and a sick benefit fund from the very early days of the company and have a substantial fund today. This ensures that all workers receive a large sum of money on their retirement or when they choose to leave the company.
5. An important aspect of life, in my opinion, is to reduce stress. Torah teachings place emphasis on the correct pathway a Jew should take through life. Very early in *Chumash* (Bereishit 4:2) we learn about Cain and Abel's offering to the Almighty.

   G-d accepts Abel's offering of the best firstling of his flock. Cain is distressed that G-d did not accept his offering of a random selection of fruit from the field. Cain is distressed and his face falls. The Almighty says to Cain: "Why are you distressed and your face sad? If you would look positively at things, all your wishes will materialise. However, if you look at the negative side of life you will be tempted to follow negative actions which will cause you distress and may even destroy you. The answer lies within you to choose which way you behave." Cain did not follow the Almighty's advice and suffered severely for his actions.

6. From the above incident we learn the importance of positive thinking and behaviour which lead us to happiness and prosperity, whereas if we look at the negative aspects of life it results in stress, high blood pressure and illness. Life becomes miserable. If one organises one's life according to these teachings, life should automatically regulate itself. My moral code has always stemmed from a Jewish database, anchored in Torah and reinforced by *mitzvot*.
7. In my opinion we are responsible for our own actions. Rabbi Akiva said the world is laid down according to certain principles which are unchangeable. Yet there is freedom of choice. A human being can do as he wishes, and will be judged according to those laid down principles. A man's nature is a result of repeated actions. Those actions become entrenched in a man's nature and it becomes very difficult to change that attitude. It is thus very important that one chooses a positive attitude to life in the early years.

Despite current difficulties and problems, we as a family face the future with confidence and utter faith in *Hashem*. This is my legacy and my heritage from past generations. This is the message to my family and future descendants.

OBITUARY

Sydney Seeff did not live to see the publication of this book, although he did see the manuscript completed and was pleased with his effort. He passed away on Friday night, 27 November 1998, corresponding to 9 Kislev 5758 after a short illness and operation from which he did not recover. He was eighty-nine.

A large crowd attended his funeral, officiated by Rabbi Yossy Goldman, the Spiritual Leader of the Sydenham-Highlands North Congregation. People came from all walks of life to pay their last respects as Sydney touched many hearts in his life-time. His immediate family will obviously feel his loss the most as will his extended family of sisters- and brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews. But many others will also miss this gentle man. Some of his acts of *chessed* were known, but many remain hidden as Sydney was a very humble person who only wanted to do good to his fellow man and did not need to be in the limelight.

Even though his funeral was on a Sunday, many workers from his beloved factory Symo Corporation made an effort to attend. They participated in the ritual of filling up the grave. In fact, the service did not continue until the whole grave had been filled in. On the Monday morning a memorial service was held at the factory for those employees who were not able to attend the funeral. Lay preachers spoke and the mood was both respectful and sad. In one year both the founding fathers of the factory had passed away. The younger generation consisting of Stanley and Bernard were now in full control. An era had passed.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman in his *hesped* (eulogy) spoke very eloquently about Sydney.

> *Chaval al d'avdin v'lo mishtakchin* "Woe unto us, for those who have been lost and cannot be found." After Moshe Rabeinu complained about the excessively bitter bondage in Egypt, Hashem said that He longed for the patriarchs of old, Abraham, Yitzchak and Yaacov, who **never** questioned his ways. Today, we too, long for our own patriarch, father and elder, Reb Zundel. Where will we find another Sydney?
>
> Sydney Seeff was a most unusual individual. A remarkable man, a gentleman: but not just a gentleman, he was actually a gentle man. It is hard to believe he is no longer alive – he always seemed so invincible. In the last twelve years, I never knew him to be ill. He was so health-conscious, so disciplined, with his swimming, walking and so on.
>
> He was an honourable man. He had a certain nobility about him. Magnanimous and friendly to one and all, including and especially, the poor and downtrodden. Whenever he walked into ***shul***, he made a point of shaking hands with all around him, rich or poor, distinguished or ordinary, he gave each one a hand and a warm *"Gut Shabbes"*.

He remembered the people others ignored – and it was not just with saying *"Gut Shabbes."* How many times people approached him for help when they were in trouble. He did not take the easy way out by referring them to the Rabbi or the Chevra Kaddisha. He got involved personally. He saw people at his home, he accepted a sense of personal responsibility for their needs.

We still do not not know the extent of Sydney's personal *tzedakah* operations. There is evidence that every *erev Shabbat* he would distribute envelopes to families in need – quietly, almost anonymously. We may never discover just how many *mitzvahs* he did in this way. He was charitable to all, no-one was ever turned away empty-handed, whether for here or for his beloved Israel, which he visited so regularly.

In the *shul* he was not an individual, he was nothing short of an institution. He occupied so many positions on the Shul Council, including President, and for many years he was extremely active in the leadership. But he was not only a *macher* he was a *mispalayl*, a daily worshipper, a *minyan* man. He knew how to lead the service. He understood *nusuach*. We shall miss his *Maftir*, his *Slichos*, his *Hoshanas* his Tisha b'Av renditions of *Ayla Tzion*, his chairmanship of the *shalosh seudot*. (I could never just get up and give a *dvar Torah* – Sydney would always welcome everyone, make a few comments on the state of the world, and only then would he introduce the Rabbi.)

He was a good son, showing deep respect for his late parents and that respect was reciprocated to him by Stanley, Ingrid and their children who honoured him with a special *derech eretz*, which is a lesson to one and all.

He was a good father who did not only love his child, but who took seriously the parental responsibility for *chinnuch*, to educate his son as to how a Jew should behave towards G-d and towards his fellow man.

He was a good husband to Naomi for over half a century. She always gave him the freedom to do his communal work, which left her at home alone on a many an evening. A good brother, especially with his life-long partner Morris, who together made up Sydmore (SYMO). They were a team who complemented each other. Since Morris's passing in January, Sydney has been saying *Kaddish* and if the truth be told, something went out of his life too, when Morris died.

Probably no man in the congregation of our *shul* kept as many *yortzheits* as Sydney Seeff. There was one *yortzheit* in particular, I want to mention. Whenever he came up to shake my hand after an *aliyah*, he would tell me the circumstances, as if it were yesterday. That was for his late sister, Rivel, who perished in the Holocaust.

He was a very good grandfather to Justine, Ricky and Taryn.

In so many ways, Sydney Seeff was an other-worldly individual. *Chaval al d'avdin v'lo mishtakchin* –"Woe unto us for those who have been lost and cannot be found."

We may not able to find another Sydney Seeff, but please G-d, his family will be able to emulate his good deeds. In this way, may his memory be blessed, and continue to be an active blessing in the lives of his loved ones and all who were privileged to know him for generations to come.

Amen

The Jewish Report carried an obituary with the headline:

Sydney Seeff – Doyen of Litvak Community Dies.

Doyen of Johannesburg's Litvak community, Sydney Seeff, passed away erev Shabbat, November 27, after a short illness. He was eighty-nine.

The hundreds that gathered at his grave side at West Park Jewish cemetery bore testimony to Sydney's popularity as a community leader, philanthropist, businessman and above all family man.

His death literally closed a chapter in his autobiography and family saga "Portals of Memory" – a book he completed a week before he took ill. Passing on the knowledge and practice of Yiddishkeit, Jewish law and customs, Zionism and *derech eretz* from past to future generations of the Seeff family, his family has undertaken to publish Sydney's legacy of love next year.

"Portals of Memory" reflects every aspect of Sydney's life from his birth in Lithuania in 1909 to coming to terms with the technological age of the 1990s. It is a tribute to his late parents Sholem Ze'ev and Chana-Sora, his late brothers Abe, Harry and partner Morris and sisters Rivel (who perished with her family in the Holocaust after Sydney's desperate attempts to bring them to South Africa) Rodel and Nina.

Modest and unassuming as Sydney was, he took no credit for himself.

Exemplary Qualities

The exemplary qualities, Sydney's *chessed* (loving kindness) and acts of *tzedakah* (charity) were referred to in the *hesped* by Rabbi Goldman, of the Sydenham-Highlands North Hebrew Congregation.

"The extent of his charitable deeds, many of which were anonymous, have yet to be discovered," Rabbi Goldman said.

Having lived through exile to the Russian interior during the First World War, Sydney arrived in South Africa to join his older brothers Abe and Harry in 1926. Most of the family, including his parents and brother Morris, followed in ensuing years.

After completing his high school education at the Jewish Government School in Johannesburg, he worked as a store assistant and salesman in various parts of the country and farmed in the Free State before entering into a partnership of more than 60 years with Morris, a graduate of the ORT school in Kovno.

The companies in the stable included Sydmore Engineering and two public companies which were later sold (Power Steel and Morlite). Today the remaining companies fall under the umbrella of the giant Symo Corporation of which Sydney was chairman.

He and Morris were among the first employers to formalise sick benefits, provident and life funds for their employees.

In 1945, Sydney married Naomi Gordon in the Yeoville Shul. They joined the Sydenham-Highlands North Congregation in 1951. Soon afterwards Sydney was co-opted to the synagogue council. He later held various offices including Treasurer, Trustee and President. In 1991 he was appointed an Honorary Life Member of the Council.

His interests in the community in South Africa began with meetings of the Krakenowo Society, which cared for his less fortunate *landsleit* and expanded to include those of all creeds through freemasonry.

Some called Sydney a *tzaddik*. To all he was a *mentch*, with an open mind and an open heart and an open pocket.

He leaves his wife Naomi, son Stanley, daughter-in-law Ingrid, and grandchildren Justine, Ricky and Taryn.

Rabbi Pfeuffer spoke about Sydney in the house of *shiva* as well as at the consecration of the tombstone:

Not many people have a good head and wealth, are humble and have a good nature. These attributes are somehow a contradiction. If a person is knowledgeable he often has no time to explain to others. Many people reach their full potential in knowledge, but very few reach high levels of good nature. Sydney Seeff was a unique person in

South Africa and indeed the world. He was a righteous man, he had a pure heart and he had special *midos*. He may have been 89, but he could relate to all ages. In Pirke Avot, we read l*ev tov u lelalei hachol* – if someone has a good heart he has everything.

The more you got to know Mr Seeff the more you realised what an amazing person he was. In the Gemorrah (Masechet Sanhedrein) Yehoshua Levy said: "A man who brings a burnt offering to the Beit Hamikdash is rewarded for a burnt offering; a man who brings a meal offering is rewarded for meal offering; but a man who is modest gets the reward as if he brought all the sacrifices."

Mr Seeff was a modest man. This does not mean he was afraid and kept away from the crowd. He knew who and what he was. He did not think he was more than others. One was not aware of his wealth. He never showed off. He used patience in all things that happened to him. He was quiet if someone hurt him. He was not a proud man. I don't think anyone ever heard him speak *Lashon Hara*. He did not cause arguments or disputes. He always had a happy disposition whatever happened. He was happy to help others. He had a good heart and was only willing to help others.

There was once a family who lived on the third floor of a building. They had no bell. One day Mr Seeff went to visit them. He walked up the three flights of stairs rang the bell and got no reply. He walked down, and went round to the back and climbed the fire escape at the age of 80! When he reached his destination he never once complained about their bell not being fixed properly.

He was the best husband, father, grandfather, uncle. He was a wonderful brother, just like the legend about the two brothers and the site of the Beit Hamikdash. He was a good neighbour, he was a good friend. He kept a secret – absolutely. You could tell him your personal weaknesses; home, business, family. You maintained your dignity. He never judged you or looked down on you. He never let on what he knew about people's lives. Even his wife did not know what he knew about people.

Lef melech beyad Hashem – the heart of a king but he could attend to everyone. He did not want to influence people but to genuinely help them. By doing what he did he actually influenced them. It might have appeared as if people walked all over him. But he was strong – he achieved whatever he wanted. He did things quietly. He never barged in and called the shots. He used to say you need to work with the heart of a person. For a person who is not happy will not work well. A worker complained that he worked very hard and it was not fair. Mr Seeff listened patiently and then answered how lucky he was to have someone who was so efficient and whom he could rely on to such an extent. The man's mood changed from aggression to total docility and he couldn't do enough for his boss.

If he was insulted – he held himself back. He worked on himself to achieve a level where he did not truly feel the hurt. He was not born with a personality which allowed things to wash over him, he worked at himself consciously.

The Gemorrah in Masechet says a person must be among the people. One must do for others what each one wants according to his nature. For example if a person buys a house and you know it is not a good buy, say it is a wonderful home. The person has already completed the deal. If he asks you before you can tell the truth, but not afterwards. This is not a form of lying. Truth is not always the obvious. Truth depends on the person's needs.

Sydney Seeff had *chessed*. One day when he had *yohrtzeit*, he went up to the man who had *davened* and complimented him on his *nusach* – it reminded him of his hometown. The person was so touched that Mr Seeff had noticed him and had made an effort to say something. He did not say you have a wonderful voice, he rather told him something special that touched his heart. He was not a person who flattered others.

He was a believer in *Hakodesh Barechu*. Once when he was a farmer he lost all his money. But he had faith. And never lost his love for Hashem. He loved Israel. It was an ideal place – Zion. He saw all Hashem's miracles associated with the various wars that have befallen Israel.

One of his employees said Mr Seeff taught him about faith. He believed that man must do his best. After that it is not in our hands it is up to Hashem. He would have a difficult day at work, but he would come home as if he had no problems. He had *emunah*, he believed money and possessions come from Hashem. When a man reaches the top he must remember who it comes from.

After his and Naomi's trauma of being attacked in their home, Mr Seeff was not emotionally disturbed. He continued as normal. He refused to be scared and run away. He believed the Almighty had helped him. He said he protected his home to the best of his ability. He did what he could to the maximum. Hashem was the only One who could help him after that.

My wife and I once had some financial difficulties and problems in our business. My wife went to Mr Seeff and began to cry. Mr Seeff's reaction was not sympathy. He said we were not believers. "You are saying *bisrat Hashem*, but you don't mean it. You must do good things and G-d will show mercy." He gave us help, but not until we looked into our own hearts – we did not have *emunah*. We said we believed in Hashem, but we did not really. It is a lesson I shall never forget.

He went to *shul* every day. His *shul* was a special place for him. He loved Pirke Avot and practised many of the teachings. Pirke Avot says find a good friend. Before one can find a friend one must be a good friend. He was a good friend and neighbour. He had a good eye and a good heart. He enjoyed giving. He was not embarrassed by these good words. He told stories in order to learn from it. He was never embarrassed. He was happy to sing in front of the congregation, to talk, to introduce people. He was happy to be in the fore-front, but in a modest way. He wanted to leave a heritage to his family. He wanted this book to record the lessons he wanted people to learn.

He saw the big things as big and the small as small. He saw the truth. He had patience. He was pure – did not say bad things, even if the situation was bad – he simply kept quiet. He was aware of his purity. In a business situation he knew when to speak and when to hold his tongue. He understood timing. He had control of his honour, jealousy, eating, human relations. He gave advice without any self interest. It was pure. He only worried about your interest, not ulterior motives. Only *gedolim* can do this.

He wanted to see everyone happy. He was friendly to all, Jew and Goy alike. I want to share this story. I went with him to meet a non-Jew, a goy. They spoke privately together. It transpired that Mr Seeff told him how he had helped a fellow Jew and lent him money, not expecting it to be repaid, but seeing it rather as a present. Mr Seeff wanted this man to help a Jew and decided to share his own experience in order to soften the man up. It worked!

Hashem loves someone who does not get cross. Even when challenged he could not be angered. He forgave people. He never harmed anybody. In all the years I knew him he was never cross, worried or jealous. He never hated or flattered others. He was not stingy. He never said a harsh word to anyone and needless to say he never insulted anyone.

Mr Seeff was like a Rosh Yeshiva who looks after all his students, but not as students but as only-sons. He was concerned only with the person on hand. He had many children who treated him like a father.

Mr Seeff we miss you bitterly. May Hashem help us to continue in your ways without you. I want his family to know that *Tzaddik katamar yifrach*, a tzaddik grows like a palm tree. But every tree needs good soil and nourishment. Mr Seeff received all of that from his family, from his wife, son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren plus the extended family. May the family have the strength to continue in his example of having a good heart and helping others as he did. May we be blessed to see Mashiach and see Mr Seeff revive with the other righteous people at this time.

APPENDIX 1

Family photographs

I have always been very close to both my immediate family as well as my extended families. I have kept contact with most members, both on my father's side and to a lesser extent on my mother's side.

My nieces and nephews have been very dear to my heart. I have acted as *sundek* at many of my nephews' *britot mila* as well as those of my great nephews. Even though the family is becoming more scattered we still have a close bond.

My nieces – 1952
FROM LEFT: Joyce, Shoshana, Denise, Estelle, Ruth, Shulamit, Bernice.

My nieces and nephews – 1980s
BACK ROW (from left):Leonard Kaplan, Bernard Seeff, Ronnie Kaplan, Alan Kaplan, Stanley Seeff. MIDDLE ROW: Charlie Resnick, Shoshana Kaplan, Denise Shapiro, Ruth Fait, Joyce Levin FRONT ROW: Estelle Spain, Annette Polovin, Bernice Coll.

In August 1995, after a family tragedy when two nephews, Jeremy Kaplan and Charles Resnick, died, the Seeff Family Trust was established to cement the families' undeniable bond. The Trust has been set up to include all the descendants of Chana Sora and Sholem Ze'ev Seeff.

All members of the family contribute and the funds are held in trust. Money from the fund is used to buy presentations for *simchas*. An amount has also been set aside for use by family members should they fall on difficult times. We meet on a regular basis at various venues and spend quality time together.

The formation of the Seeff Family Trust 1996.
(from left) BACK ROW: Bernard, Cindy, Shoshana, Carol-Ann, Dina, Aran, Colin, Joyce, Tami, Ronit, Sharon, Gayle. FOURTH ROW: Ramona, Alan, Ronnie, Stanley, Neville, Gavin, Jack, Farrel, Isarae. THIRD ROW: Gerald, Sheryl, Yvonne, Ingrid, Abe, Ruth, Denise, Loren, Nicky. SECOND ROW: Gila, Beni, Crystal, Naomi, Sydney, Dora, Morris. FRONT ROW: Yehudit, Romi, Warren, Taryn, Ricky, Bianca, Daniel, Antony. ABSENT: Justine, Daniella

Harry's family

The Coll family

Eyton, Raymond, Bernice, Lisa, Arieh and Gidon.

Louise Strick

Shulamit and David Strick's daughter

Estelle and Harry Spain and family.

From left: Lisa, Estelle, Harry and Karen. Michael Shuman (inset)

Annette and Gordon Polovin and family.

Back: Marc, Suanne.
Front: Lauren, Annette, Gordon and Greg.

Morris' family

Ruth and Abe Fait and family

BACK ROW (from left): Loren, Farrel, Sharon, Gavin, Nicky, Steven.
FRONT ROW: Abe, Talia, Ruth.

Denise and Jack Shapiro and family.

BACK ROW (from left): Carol-Ann, Gayle
FRONT ROW: Denise, Jack

Joyce and Neville Levin and family

BACK ROW (from left): Colin, Laurence, Ronit, Tami.
FRONT ROW: Joyce, Neville.

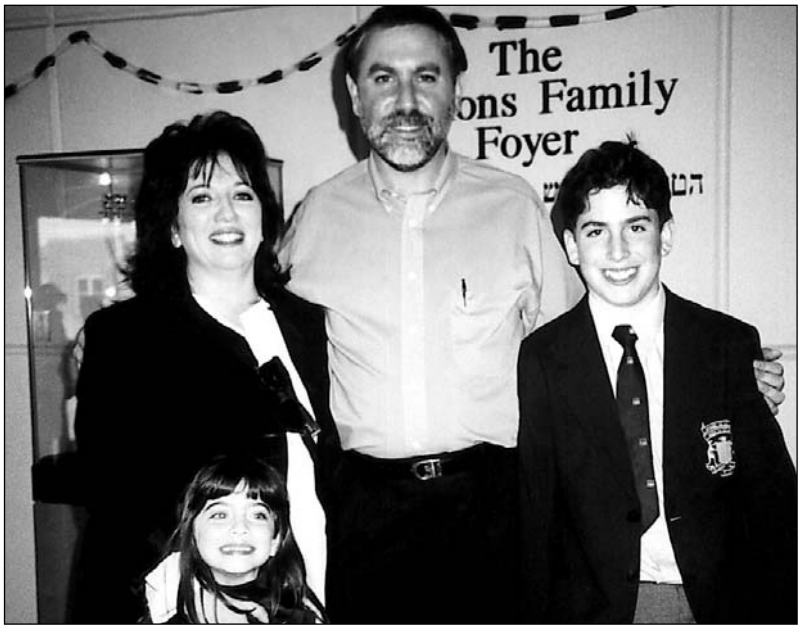
Bernard and Isarae and family

BACK ROW (from left): Isarae, Bernard.
FRONT ROW: Bianca, Antony, Daniel.

Nina's family

Ronnie and Yvonne Kaplan and family

From left: Aran, Dina, Yvonne, Ronnie, Cindy, Jonathan, Jeremy.

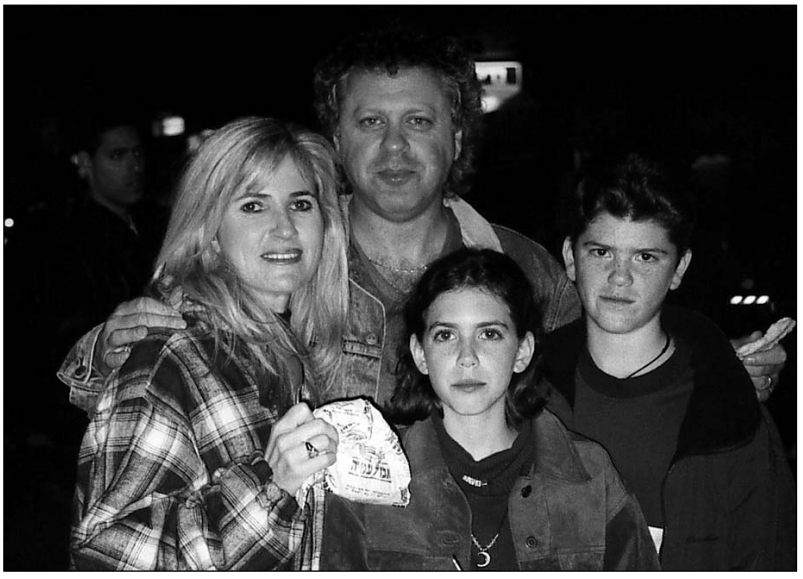


Leonard and Michelle Kaplan and family

From left: Nicole, Michelle, Leonard, Dean.

Shoshana and Gerald Kaplan and family

From left: Yehudit, Gerald, Daniela, Adam, Gila, Shoshana, Ramona



Alan and Sheryl Kaplan and family

BACK ROW (from left): Sheryl, Alan, Warren
FRONT ROW: Romi

Cousins from my father's side

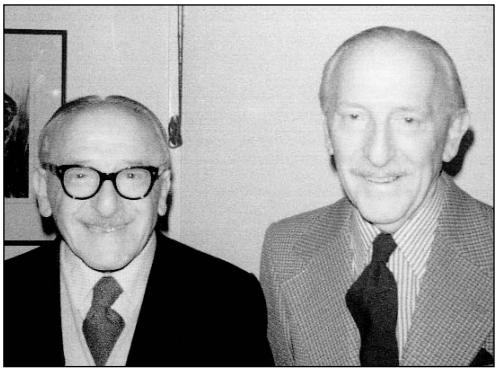
My father's brother Louis and his wife Freidel left Lithuania early in the century and came to South Africa. I have kept contact with all my cousins in this country.

Louis and Freda Seeff and family at their Golden Anniversary
BACK ROW (from left): Joe Seeff, Issy Seeff, Frieda Seeff, Louis Elk, Annie Elk, Hannie Seeff, Harry Seeff, Rita Seeff, Harry Seeff, Tilly Seeff, Sam Seeff, Bertha Miller, Rodel Resnick, Dora Seeff, Morris Seeff, Sydney Seeff.
FRONT ROW: Abe Seeff, Gertie Seeff, Billy Seeff, Mr Goldberg, Louis Seeff, Frieda Seeff, Nina Kaplan, Beni Kaplan, Naomi Seeff.

Rae and Phil Blend with their son David.

Sam and Tilly Seeff and Family
From left: Manfred, Sam, Evelyn, Geoffrey, Tilly.

Anne and Louis Elk and family
BACK ROW (from left): Louis, Anne, Basil
FRONT ROW: Gwyneth, Percy.



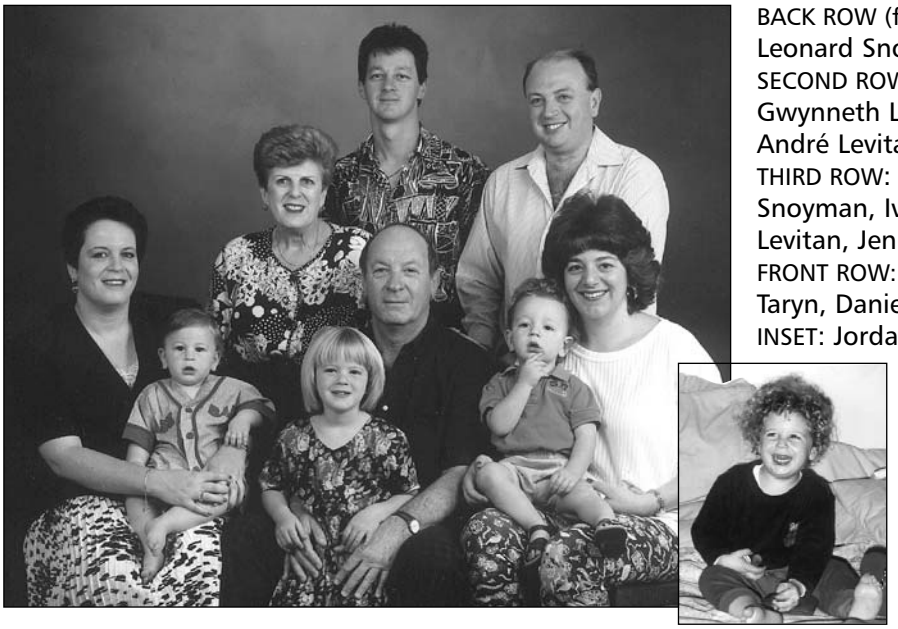
Issy and Harry Seeff

Basil and Daphne Elk and family
From left: Shelley, Basil, Daphne, Fran, Gidon Fainman, Carol, Michael Rod, Joshua Rod. Absent: Talia Rod.

Percy and Ethne Elk and family
From left: Clifford, Rayna, Erica, Gavriel (Graeme).
IN FRONT: Percy and Ethne

Raymond and Charmeon Seeff
From left: Belinda, Charmeon, Laurence, Raymond

Harry and Hannie Seeff
From left: Leonard, Harry, Norman
Seated: Hannie



BACK ROW (from left): Leonard Snoyman
SECOND ROW: Gwynneth Levitan, André Levitan
THIRD ROW: Hayley Snoyman, Ivan Levitan, Jenny Levitan
FRONT ROW: Dean, Taryn, Daniel
INSET: Jordan

Cousins from my mother's side

My mother only had one brother, Lipa Benche. He and his wife moved to the United States of America at the beginning of the century. My Shapiro cousins therefore all live in that country. I have met several cousins during my visits.

Stessie and Lipa Benche's daughters.
BACK ROW (from left): Ida, Anna, Sarah, Fendl (Fanny)
FRONT ROW: Dorothy

My cousins and their husbands – 1977
BACK ROW (from left): Sol Schlein, Ida Schlein, Elias Lieberman, Dorothy Lieberman.
FRONT ROW: Ethel Shapiro, Anna Lipson.

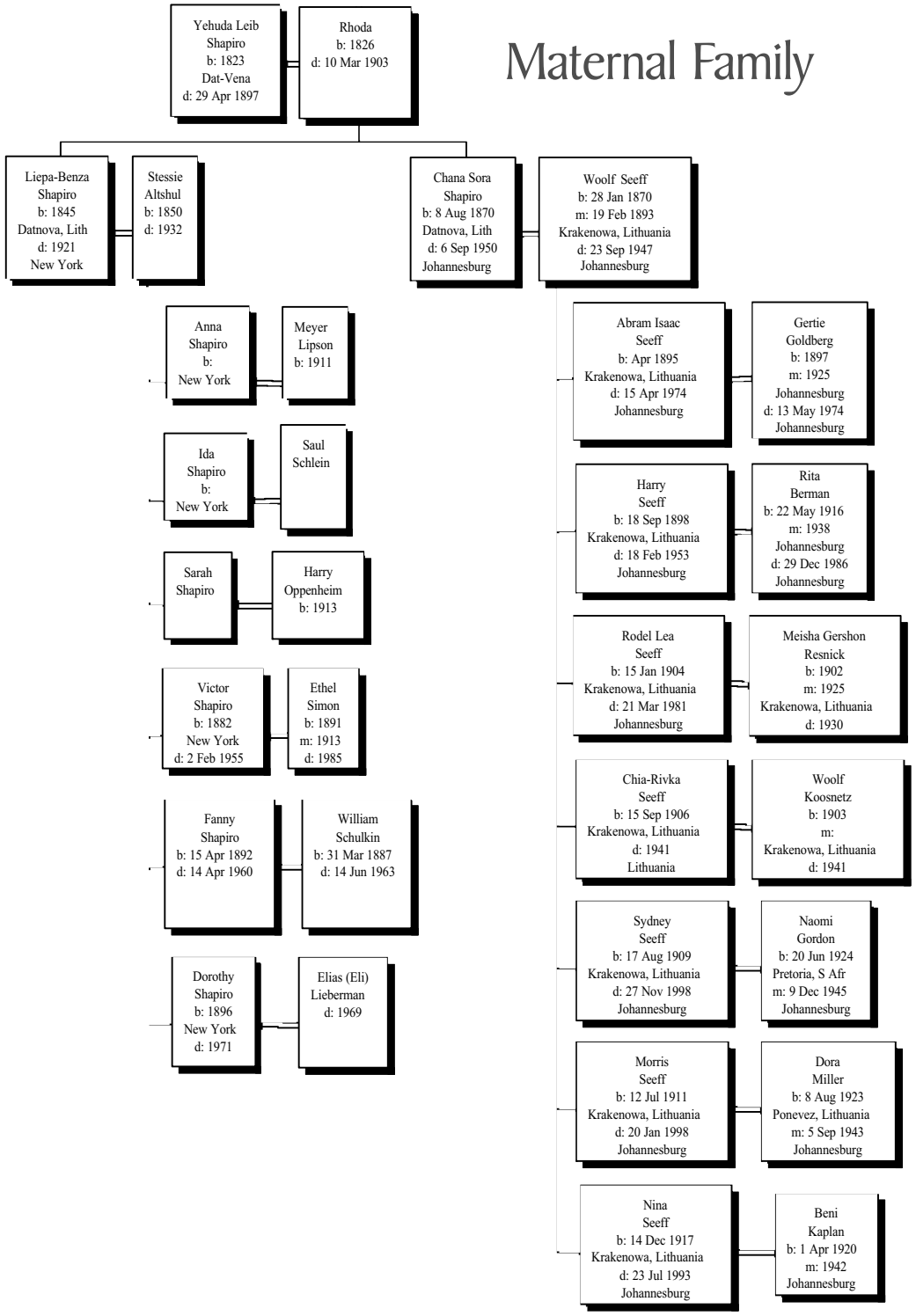
Victor and Ethel Shapiro's family
BACK ROW (from left): Leonard, Annette, Ethel, Victor. FRONT ROW: Judy, Paula.

Victor and Ethel Shapiro.

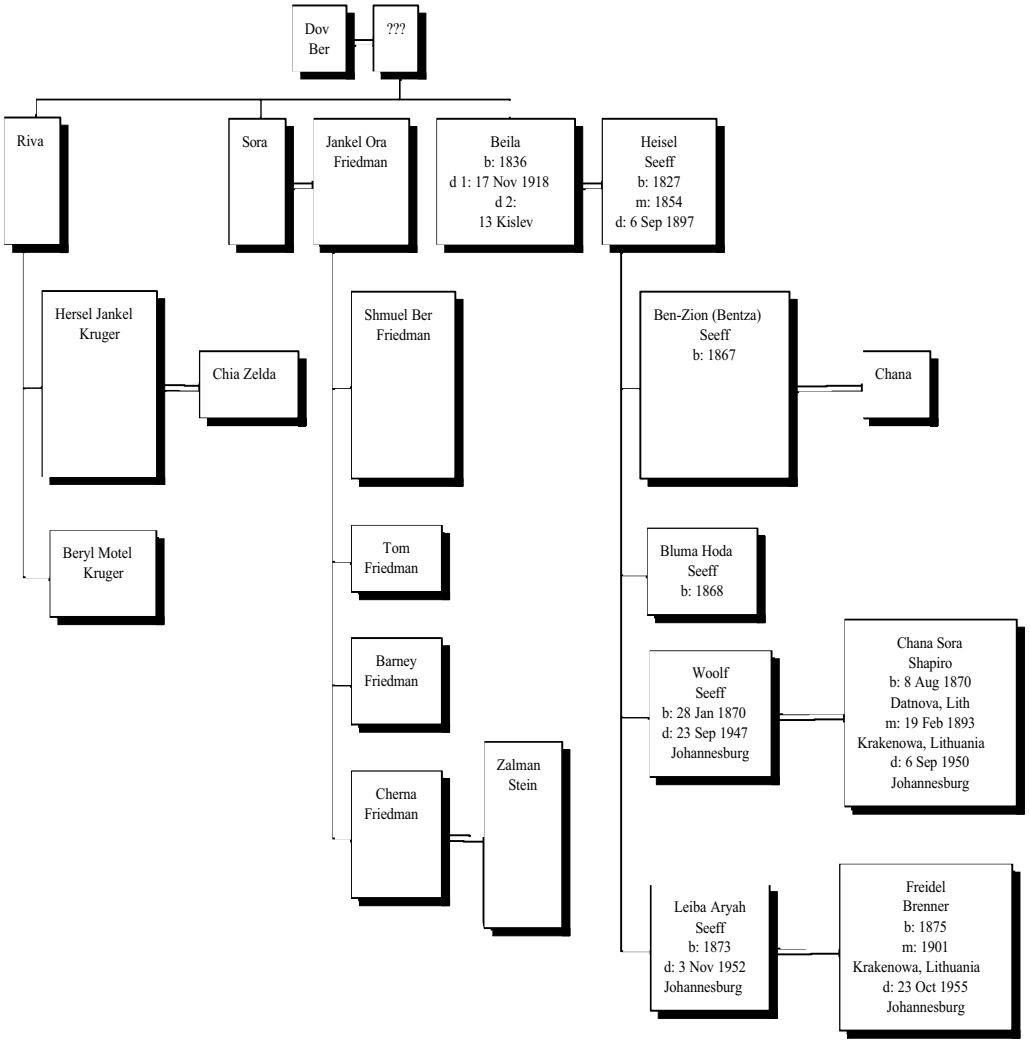
APPENDIX II

Family tree

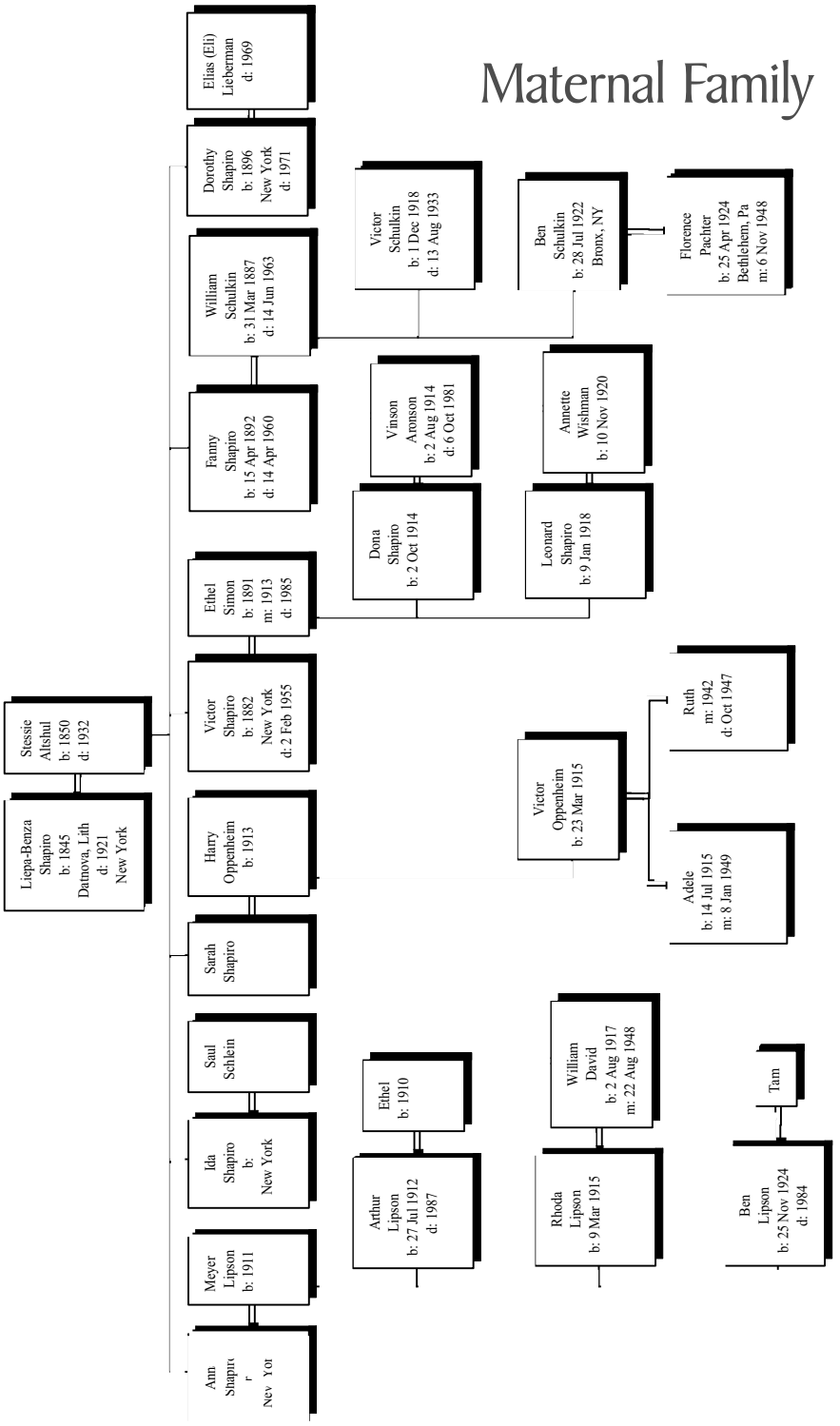
Maternal Family


Yehuda Leib Shapiro b: 1823 Dat-Vena d: 29 Apr 1897
Rhoda b: 1826 d: 10 Mar 1903
Liepa-Benza Shapiro b: 1845 Datnova, Lith d: 1921 New York
Stessie Altshul b: 1850 d: 1932
Chana Sora Shapiro b: 8 Aug 1870 Datnova, Lith d: 6 Sep 1950 Johannesburg
Woolf Seeff b: 28 Jan 1870 m: 19 Feb 1893 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 23 Sep 1947 Johannesburg
Anna Shapiro b: New York
Meyer Lipson b: 1911
Ida Shapiro b: New York
Saul Schlein
Sarah Shapiro
Harry Oppenheim b: 1913
Victor Shapiro b: 1882 New York d: 2 Feb 1955
Ethel Simon b: 1891 m: 1913 d: 1985
Fanny Shapiro b: 15 Apr 1892 d: 14 Apr 1960
William Schulkin b: 31 Mar 1887 d: 14 Jun 1963
Dorothy Shapiro b: 1896 New York d: 1971
Elias (Eli) Lieberman d: 1969
Abram Isaac Seeff b: Apr 1895 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 15 Apr 1974 Johannesburg
Gertie Goldberg b: 1897 m: 1925 Johannesburg d: 13 May 1974 Johannesburg
Harry Seeff b: 18 Sep 1898 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 18 Feb 1953 Johannesburg
Rita Berman b: 22 May 1916 m: 1938 Johannesburg d: 29 Dec 1986 Johannesburg
Rodel Lea Seeff b: 15 Jan 1904 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 21 Mar 1981 Johannesburg
Meisha Gershon Resnick b: 1902 m: 1925 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1930
Chia-Rivka Seeff b: 15 Sep 1906 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1941 Lithuania
Woolf Koosnetz b: 1903 m: Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1941
Sydney Seeff b: 17 Aug 1909 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 27 Nov 1998 Johannesburg
Naomi Gordon b: 20 Jun 1924 Pretoria, S Afr m: 9 Dec 1945 Johannesburg
Morris Seeff b: 12 Jul 1911 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 20 Jan 1998 Johannesburg
Dora Miller b: 8 Aug 1923 Ponevez, Lithuania m: 5 Sep 1943 Johannesburg
Nina Seeff b: 14 Dec 1917 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 23 Jul 1993 Johannesburg
Beni Kaplan b: 1 Apr 1920 m: 1942 Johannesburg

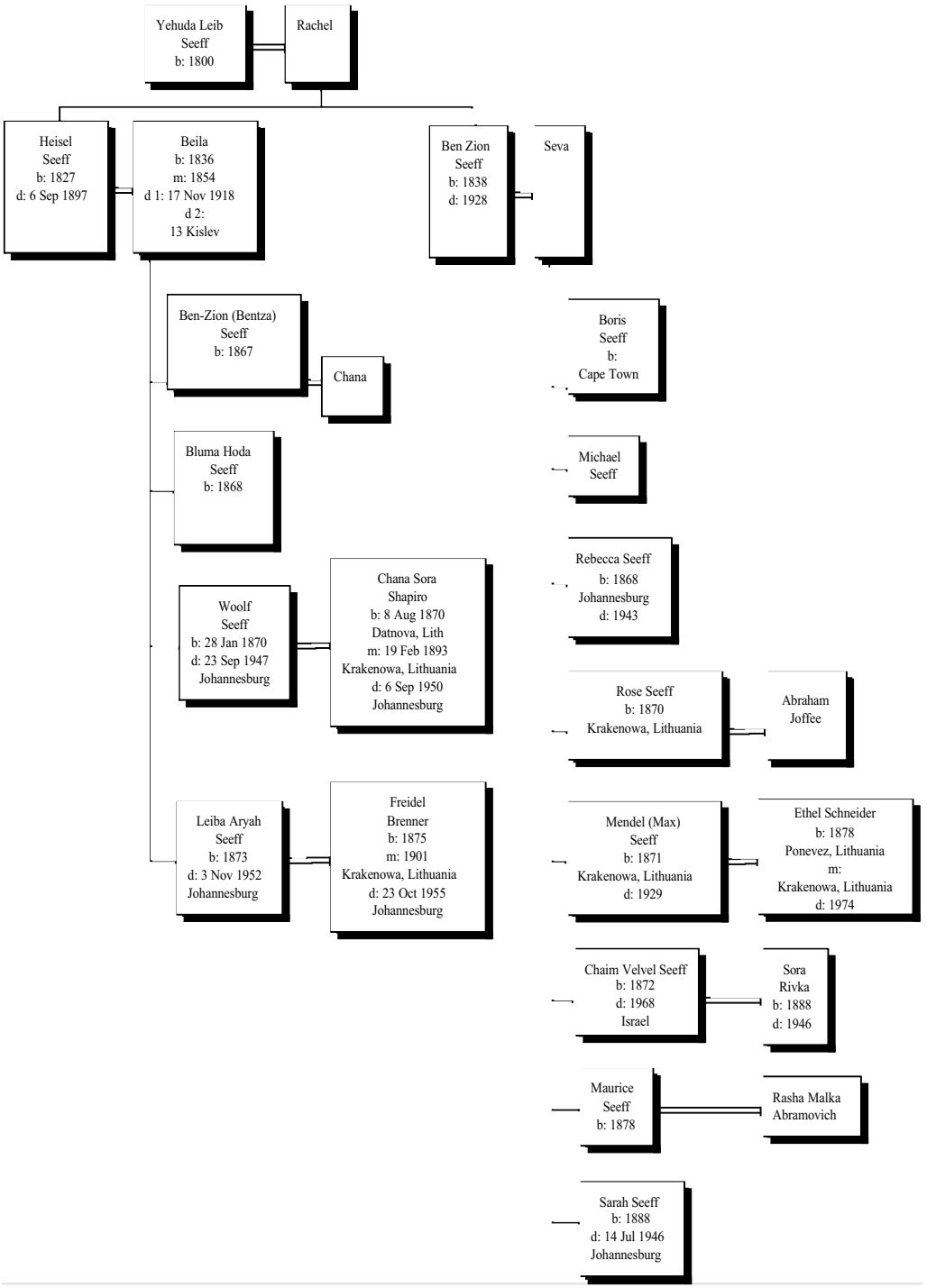
Maternal Family


Dov Ber
???
Riva
Sora
Jankel Ora Friedman
Beila b: 1836 d 1: 17 Nov 1918 d 2: 13 Kislev
Heisel Seeff b: 1827 m: 1854 d: 6 Sep 1897
Hersel Jankel Kruger
Chia Zelda
Beryl Motel Kruger
Shmuel Ber Friedman
Tom Friedman
Barney Friedman
Cherna Friedman
Zalman Stein
Ben-Zion (Bentza) Seeff b: 1867
Chana
Bluma Hoda Seeff b: 1868
Woolf Seeff b: 28 Jan 1870 d: 23 Sep 1947 Johannesburg
Chana Sora Shapiro b: 8 Aug 1870 Datnova, Lith m: 19 Feb 1893 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 6 Sep 1950 Johannesburg
Leiba Aryah Seeff b: 1873 d: 3 Nov 1952 Johannesburg
Freidel Brenner b: 1875 m: 1901 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 23 Oct 1955 Johannesburg

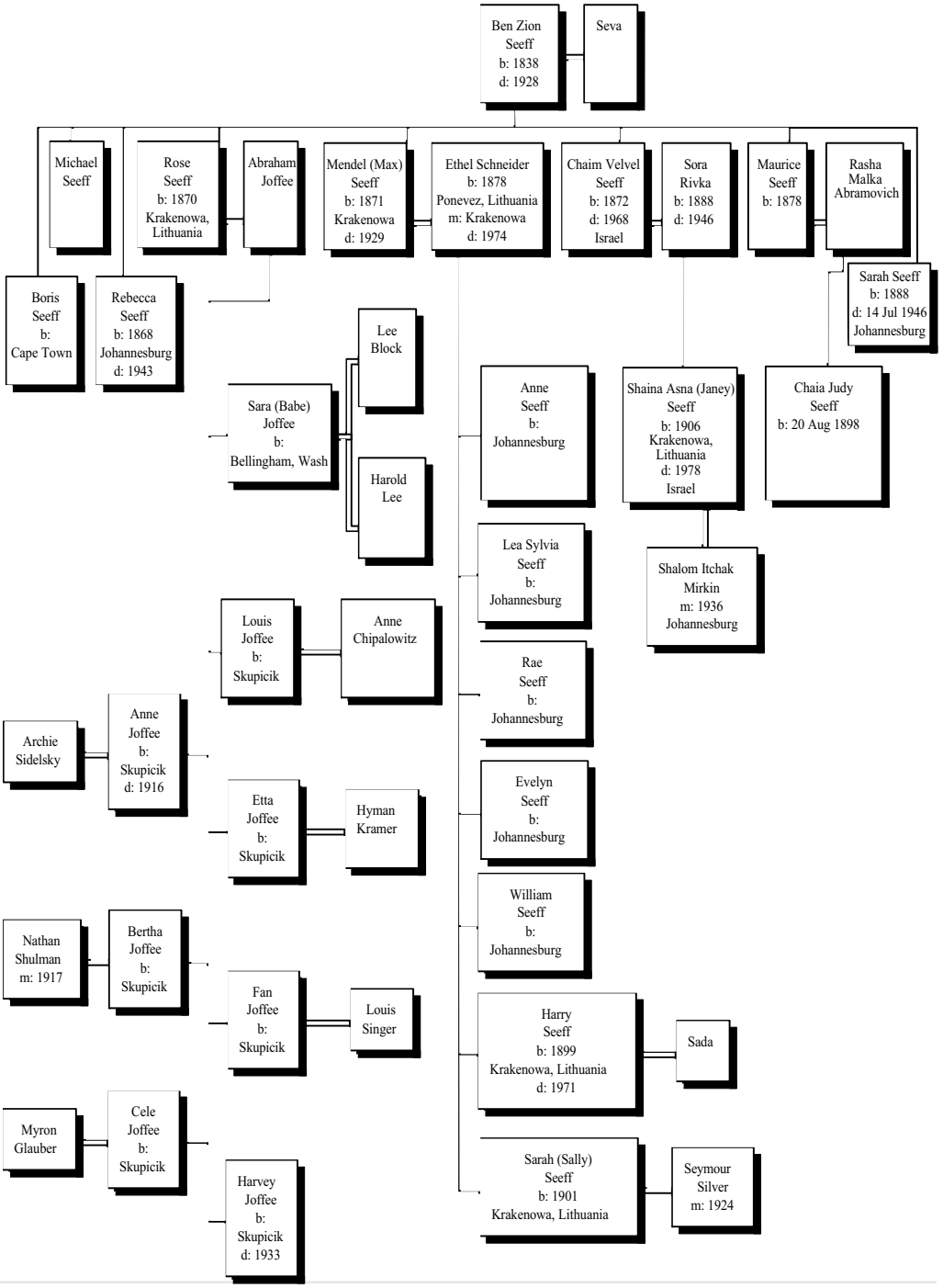
Maternal Family


Liepa-Benza Shapiro b: 1845 Datnova, Lith d: 1921 New York
Stessie Altshul b: 1850 d: 1932
Victor Shapiro b: 1882 New York d: 2 Feb 1955
Ethel Simon b: 1891 m: 1913 d: 1985
Fanny Shapiro b: 15 Apr 1892 d: 14 Apr 1960
William Schulkin b: 31 Mar 1887 d: 14 Jun 1963
Elias (Eli) Lieberman d: 1969
Dorothy Shapiro b: 1896 New York d: 1971
Victor Schulkin b: 1 Dec 1918 d: 13 Aug 1933
Ben Schulkin b: 28 Jul 1922 Bronx, NY
Florence Pachter b: 25 Apr 1924 Bethlehem, Pa m: 6 Nov 1948
Vinson Aronson b: 2 Aug 1914 d: 6 Oct 1981
Dona Shapiro b: 2 Oct 1914
Annette Wishman b: 10 Nov 1920
Leonard Shapiro b: 9 Jan 1918
Harry Oppenheim b: 1913
Sarah Shapiro
Victor Oppenheim b: 23 Mar 1915
Ruth m: 1942 d: Oct 1947
Adele b: 14 Jul 1915 m: 8 Jan 1949
Saul Schlein
Ida Shapiro b: New York
Meyer Lipson b: 1911
Ann Shapiro New Yor
Ethel b: 1910
Arthur Lipson b: 27 Jul 1912 d: 1987
William David b: 2 Aug 1917 m: 22 Aug 1948
Rhoda Lipson b: 9 Mar 1915
Tam
Ben Lipson b: 25 Nov 1924 d: 1984

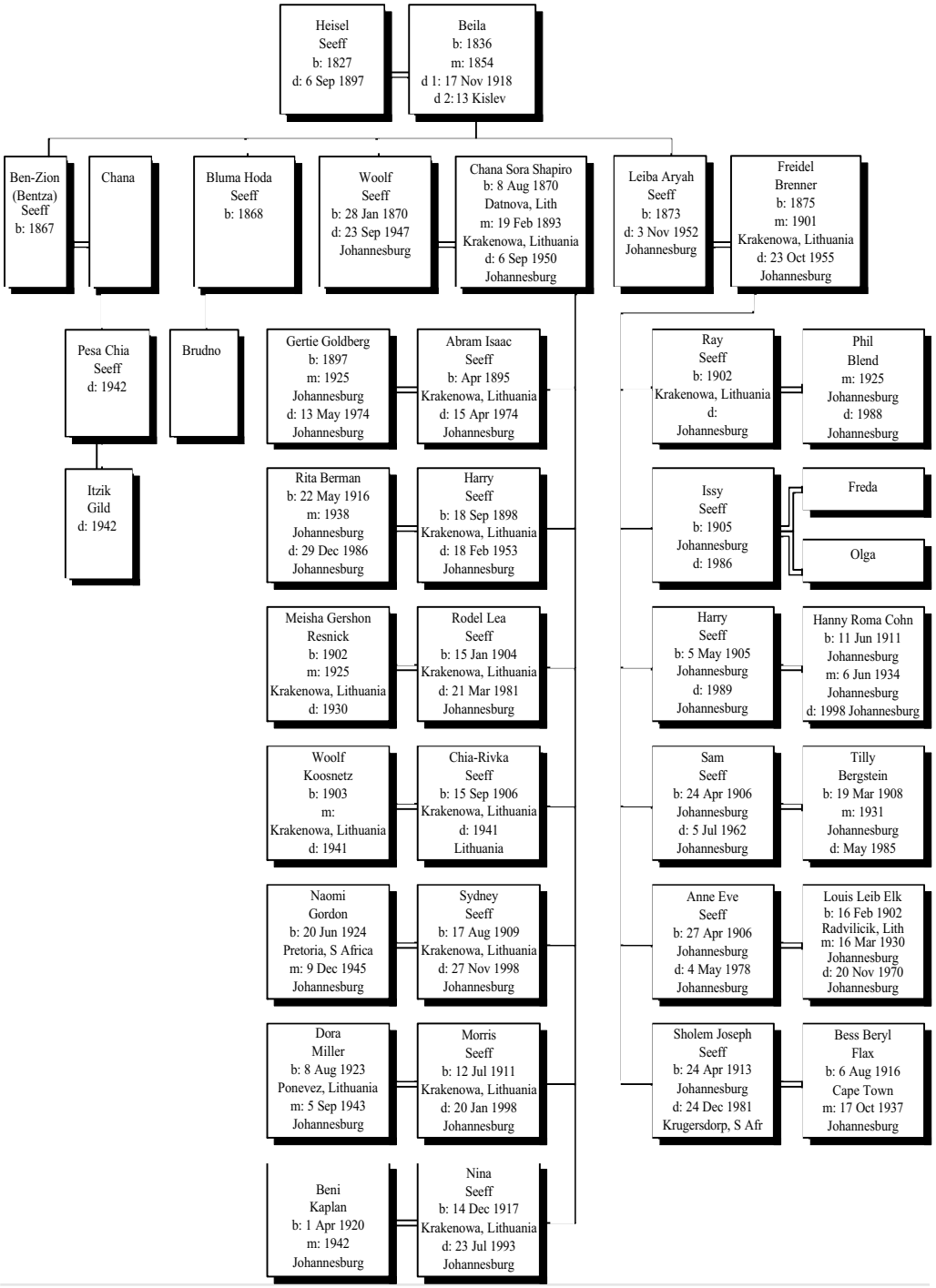
Paternal Family


Yehuda Leib Seeff b: 1800
Rachel
Heisel Seeff b: 1827 d: 6 Sep 1897
Beila b: 1836 m: 1854 d 1: 17 Nov 1918 d 2: 13 Kislev
Ben Zion Seeff b: 1838 d: 1928
Seva
Ben-Zion (Bentza) Seeff b: 1867
Chana
Boris Seeff b: Cape Town
Bluma Hoda Seeff b: 1868
Michael Seeff
Rebecca Seeff b: 1868 Johannesburg d: 1943
Woolf Seeff b: 28 Jan 1870 d: 23 Sep 1947 Johannesburg
Chana Sora Shapiro b: 8 Aug 1870 Datnova, Lith m: 19 Feb 1893 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 6 Sep 1950 Johannesburg
Rose Seeff b: 1870 Krakenowa, Lithuania
Abraham Joffee
Leiba Aryah Seeff b: 1873 d: 3 Nov 1952 Johannesburg
Freidel Brenner b: 1875 m: 1901 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 23 Oct 1955 Johannesburg
Mendel (Max) Seeff b: 1871 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1929
Ethel Schneider b: 1878 Ponevez, Lithuania m: Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1974
Chaim Velvel Seeff b: 1872 d: 1968 Israel
Sora Rivka b: 1888 d: 1946
Maurice Seeff b: 1878
Rasha Malka Abramovich
Sarah Seeff b: 1888 d: 14 Jul 1946 Johannesburg

Paternal Family

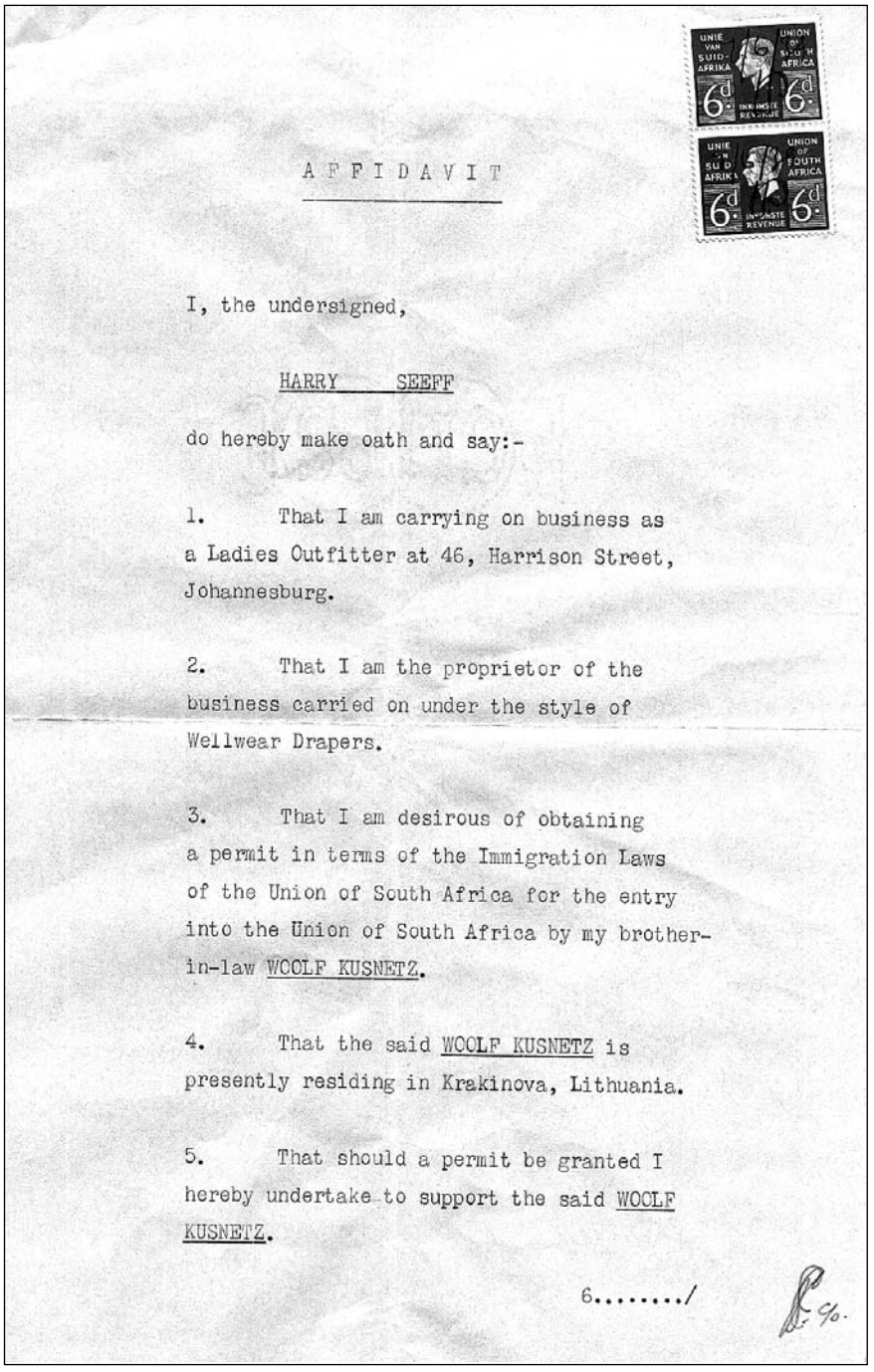

Ben Zion Seeff b: 1838 d: 1928
Seva
Michael Seeff
Rose Seeff b: 1870 Krakenowa, Lithuania
Abraham Joffee
Mendel (Max) Seeff b: 1871 Krakenowa d: 1929
Ethel Schneider b: 1878 Ponevez, Lithuania m: Krakenowa d: 1974
Chaim Velvel Seeff b: 1872 d: 1968 Israel
Sora Rivka b: 1888 d: 1946
Maurice Seeff b: 1878
Rasha Malka Abramovich
Sarah Seeff b: 1888 d: 14 Jul 1946 Johannesburg
Boris Seeff b: Cape Town
Rebecca Seeff b: 1868 Johannesburg d: 1943
Lee Block
Sara (Babe) Joffee b: Bellingham, Wash
Harold Lee
Anne Seeff b: Johannesburg
Shaina Asna (Janey) Seeff b: 1906 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1978 Israel
Chaia Judy Seeff b: 20 Aug 1898
Lea Sylvia Seeff b: Johannesburg
Shalom Itchak Mirkin m: 1936 Johannesburg
Louis Joffee b: Skupicik
Anne Chipalowitz
Rae Seeff b: Johannesburg
Archie Sidelsky
Anne Joffee b: Skupicik d: 1916
Evelyn Seeff b: Johannesburg
Etta Joffee b: Skupicik
Hyman Kramer
William Seeff b: Johannesburg
Nathan Shulman m: 1917
Bertha Joffee b: Skupicik
Harry Seeff b: 1899 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1971
Sada
Fan Joffee b: Skupicik
Louis Singer
Myron Glauber
Cele Joffee b: Skupicik
Sarah (Sally) Seeff b: 1901 Krakenowa, Lithuania
Seymour Silver m: 1924
Harvey Joffee b: Skupicik d: 1933

Paternal Family


Heisel Seeff b: 1827 d: 6 Sep 1897
Beila b: 1836 m: 1854 d 1: 17 Nov 1918 d 2: 13 Kislev
Ben-Zion (Bentza) Seeff b: 1867
Chana
Bluma Hoda Seeff b: 1868
Woolf Seeff b: 28 Jan 1870 d: 23 Sep 1947 Johannesburg
Chana Sora Shapiro b: 8 Aug 1870 Datnova, Lith m: 19 Feb 1893 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 6 Sep 1950 Johannesburg
Leiba Aryah Seeff b: 1873 d: 3 Nov 1952 Johannesburg
Freidel Brenner b: 1875 m: 1901 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 23 Oct 1955 Johannesburg
Pesa Chia Seeff d: 1942
Brudno
Itzik Gild d: 1942
Gertie Goldberg b: 1897 m: 1925 Johannesburg d: 13 May 1974 Johannesburg
Abram Isaac Seeff b: Apr 1895 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 15 Apr 1974 Johannesburg
Rita Berman b: 22 May 1916 m: 1938 Johannesburg d: 29 Dec 1986 Johannesburg
Harry Seeff b: 18 Sep 1898 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 18 Feb 1953 Johannesburg
Meisha Gershon Resnick b: 1902 m: 1925 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1930
Rodel Lea Seeff b: 15 Jan 1904 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 21 Mar 1981 Johannesburg
Woolf Koosnetz b: 1903 m: Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1941
Chia-Rivka Seeff b: 15 Sep 1906 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 1941 Lithuania
Naomi Gordon b: 20 Jun 1924 Pretoria, S Africa m: 9 Dec 1945 Johannesburg
Sydney Seeff b: 17 Aug 1909 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 27 Nov 1998 Johannesburg
Dora Miller b: 8 Aug 1923 Ponevez, Lithuania m: 5 Sep 1943 Johannesburg
Morris Seeff b: 12 Jul 1911 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 20 Jan 1998 Johannesburg
Beni Kaplan b: 1 Apr 1920 m: 1942 Johannesburg
Nina Seeff b: 14 Dec 1917 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: 23 Jul 1993 Johannesburg
Ray Seeff b: 1902 Krakenowa, Lithuania d: Johannesburg
Phil Blend m: 1925 Johannesburg d: 1988 Johannesburg
Issy Seeff b: 1905 Johannesburg d: 1986
Freda
Olga
Harry Seeff b: 5 May 1905 Johannesburg d: 1989 Johannesburg
Hanny Roma Cohn b: 11 Jun 1911 Johannesburg m: 6 Jun 1934 Johannesburg d: 1998 Johannesburg
Sam Seeff b: 24 Apr 1906 Johannesburg d: 5 Jul 1962 Johannesburg
Tilly Bergstein b: 19 Mar 1908 m: 1931 Johannesburg d: May 1985
Anne Eve Seeff b: 27 Apr 1906 Johannesburg d: 4 May 1978 Johannesburg
Louis Leib Elk b: 16 Feb 1902 Radvilicik, Lith m: 16 Mar 1930 Johannesburg d: 20 Nov 1970 Johannesburg
Sholem Joseph Seeff b: 24 Apr 1913 Johannesburg d: 24 Dec 1981 Krugersdorp, S Afr
Bess Beryl Flax b: 6 Aug 1916 Cape Town m: 17 Oct 1937 Johannesburg

APPENDIX III

Affidavits for Woolf Kuznec



AFFIDAVIT

I, the undersigned,

HARRY SEEFF

do hereby make oath and say:-

1. That I am carrying on business as a Ladies Outfitter at 46, Harrison Street, Johannesburg.

2. That I am the proprietor of the business carried on under the style of Wellwear Drapers.

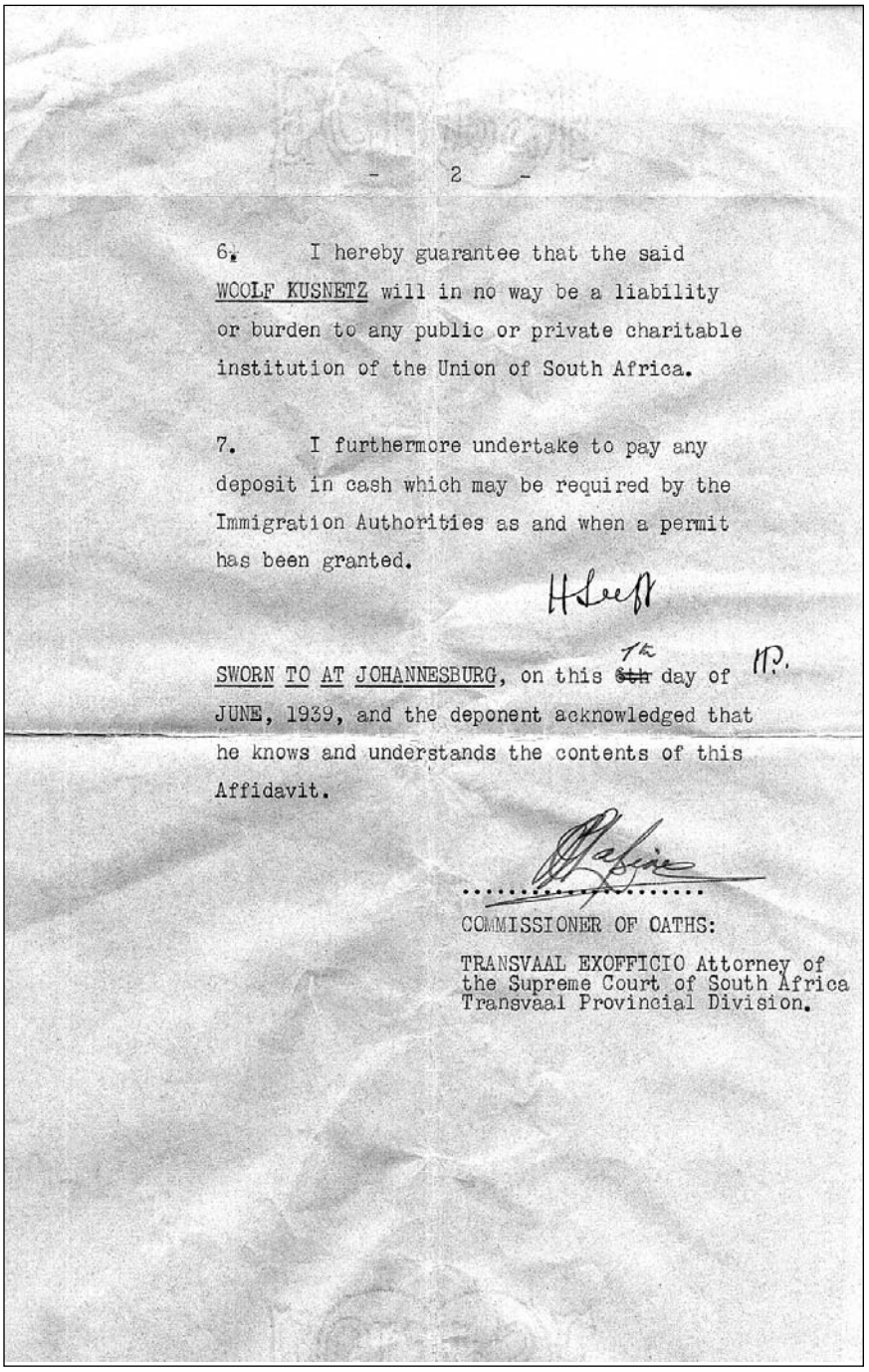
3. That I am desirous of obtaining a permit in terms of the Immigration Laws of the Union of South Africa for the entry into the Union of South Africa by my brother-in-law WOOLF KUSNETZ.

4. That the said WOOLF KUSNETZ is presently residing in Krakinova, Lithuania.

5. That should a permit be granted I hereby undertake to support the said WOOLF KUSNETZ.

6...../

From Harry Seeff



- 2 -

6. I hereby guarantee that the said WOOLF KUSNETZ will in no way be a liability or burden to any public or private charitable institution of the Union of South Africa.

7. I furthermore undertake to pay any deposit in cash which may be required by the Immigration Authorities as and when a permit has been granted.

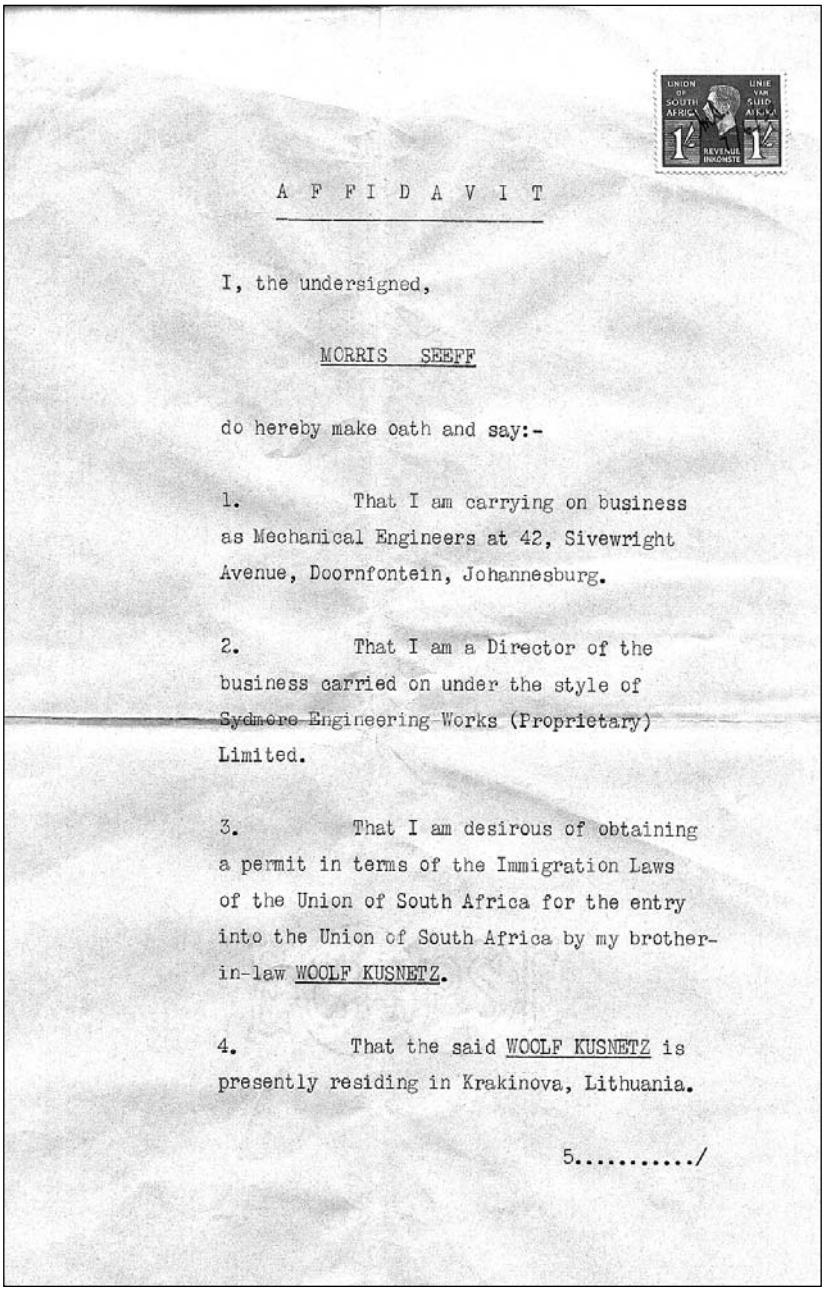
H Lieff

SWORN TO AT JOHANNESBURG, on this ~~5th~~ 7th day of JUNE, 1939, and the deponent acknowledged that he knows and understands the contents of this Affidavit.

.....

COMMISSIONER OF OATHS:

TRANSVAAL EXOFFICIO Attorney of the Supreme Court of South Africa Transvaal Provincial Division.



A F F I D A V I T

I, the undersigned,

MORRIS SEEFF

do hereby make oath and say:-

1. That I am carrying on business as Mechanical Engineers at 42, Sivewright Avenue, Doornfontein, Johannesburg.

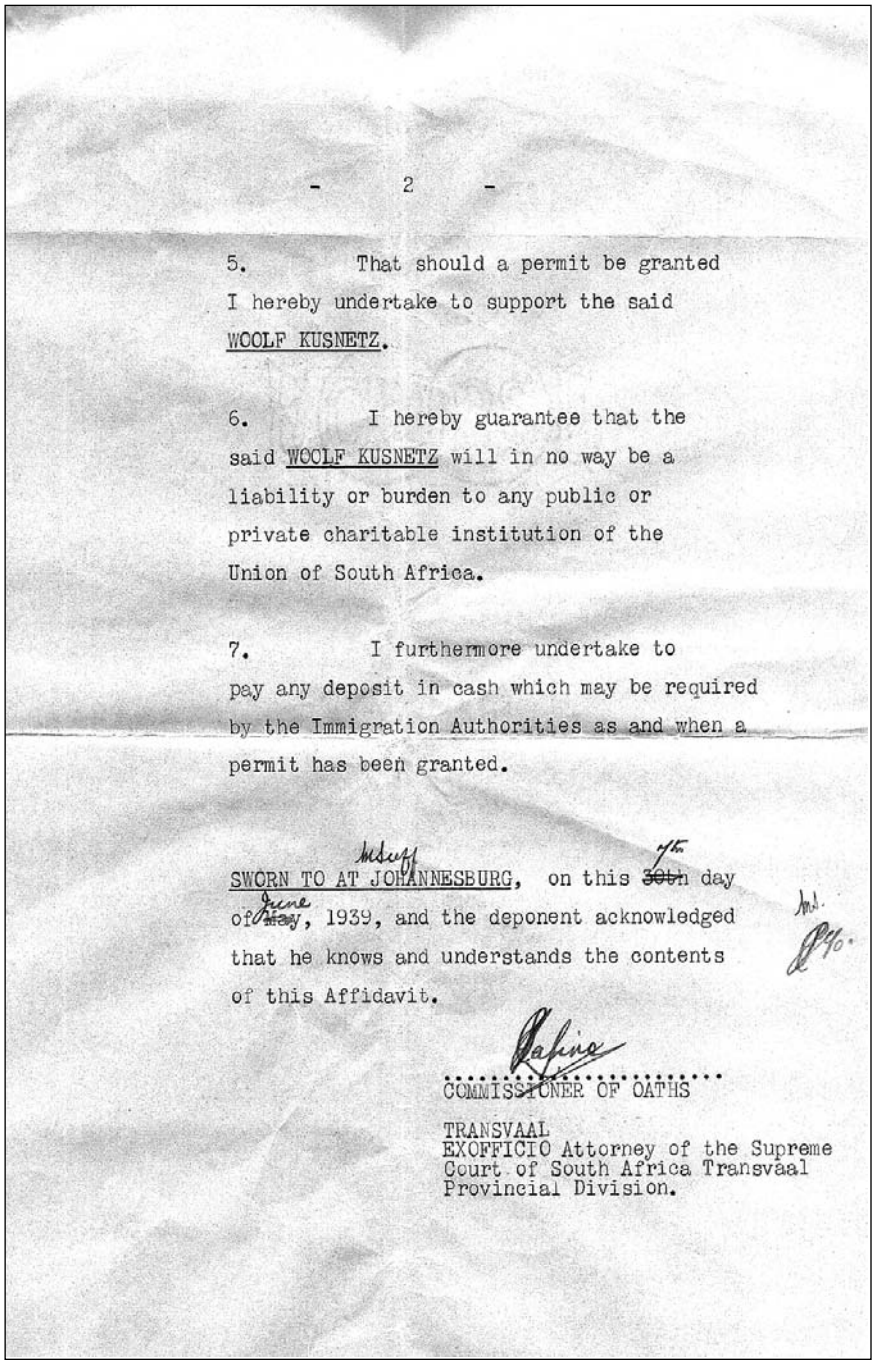
2. That I am a Director of the business carried on under the style of ~~Sydmore Engineering Works~~ (Proprietary) Limited.

3. That I am desirous of obtaining a permit in terms of the Immigration Laws of the Union of South Africa for the entry into the Union of South Africa by my brother-in-law WOOLF KUSNETZ.

4. That the said WOOLF KUSNETZ is presently residing in Krakinova, Lithuania.

5...../

From Morris Seeff



- 2 -

5. That should a permit be granted I hereby undertake to support the said WOOLF KUSNETZ.

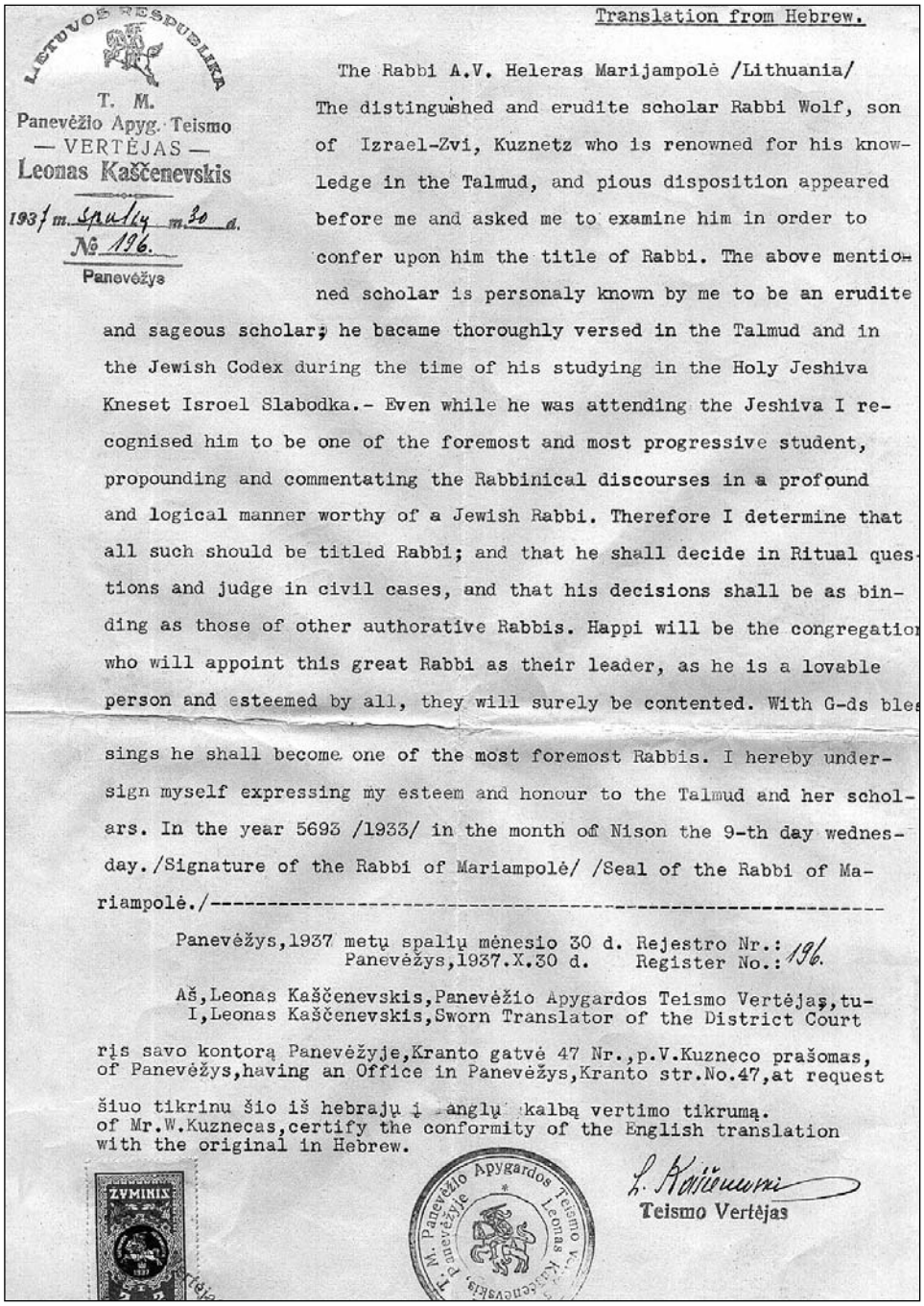
6. I hereby guarantee that the said WOOLF KUSNETZ will in no way be a liability or burden to any public or private charitable institution of the Union of South Africa.

7. I furthermore undertake to pay any deposit in cash which may be required by the Immigration Authorities as and when a permit has been granted.

SWORN TO AT JOHANNESBURG, on this ~~30th~~ 7th day of ~~May~~ June, 1939, and the deponent acknowledged that he knows and understands the contents of this Affidavit.

.....
COMMISSIONER OF OATHS

TRANSVAAL
EXOFFICIO Attorney of the Supreme Court of South Africa Transvaal Provincial Division.



LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKA
T. M.
Panevėžio Apyg. Teismo
— VERTĖJAS —
Leonas Kaščenevskis
1937 m. spalių m. 30 d.
№ 196.
Panevėžys

Translation from Hebrew.

The Rabbi A.V. Heleras Marijampolė /Lithuania/

The distinguished and erudite scholar Rabbi Wolf, son of Izrael-Zvi, Kuznetz who is renowned for his knowledge in the Talmud, and pious disposition appeared before me and asked me to examine him in order to confer upon him the title of Rabbi. The above mentioned scholar is personaly known by me to be an erudite and sageous scholar; he bacame thoroughly versed in the Talmud and in the Jewish Codex during the time of his studying in the Holy Jeshiva Kneset Isroel Slabodka.- Even while he was attending the Jeshiva I recognised him to be one of the foremost and most progressive student, propounding and commentating the Rabbinical discourses in a profound and logical manner worthy of a Jewish Rabbi. Therefore I determine that all such should be titled Rabbi; and that he shall decide in Ritual questions and judge in civil cases, and that his decisions shall be as binding as those of other authorative Rabbis. Happi will be the congregation who will appoint this great Rabbi as their leader, as he is a lovable person and esteemed by all, they will surely be contented. With G-ds blessings he shall become one of the most foremost Rabbis. I hereby undersign myself expressing my esteem and honour to the Talmud and her scholars. In the year 5693 /1933/ in the month of Nison the 9-th day wednesday./Signature of the Rabbi of Mariampolė/ /Seal of the Rabbi of Mariampolė./----------

Panevėžys,1937 metų spalių mėnesio 30 d. Rejestro Nr.: 196
Panevėžys,1937.X.30 d. Register No.: 196.

Aš,Leonas Kaščenevskis,Panevėžio Apygardos Teismo Vertėjas,tu-
I,Leonas Kaščenevskis,Sworn Translator of the District Court

ris savo kontorą Panevėžyje,Kranto gatvė 47 Nr.,p.V.Kuzneco prašomas,
of Panevėžys,having an Office in Panevėžys,Kranto str.No.47,at request

šiuo tikrinu šio iš hebrajų į anglų kalbą vertimo tikrumą.
of Mr.W.Kuznecas,certify the conformity of the English translation
with the original in Hebrew.

ZYMINIS

T. M. Panevėžio Apygardos Teismo V. Kaščenevskis

L. Kaščenevskis
Teismo Vertėjas

References for Woolf Kuznec
From Seminary of Rabbis and Rabbi A V Heleras

LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKA
T. M.
Panevėžio Apyg. Teismo
— VERTĖJAS —
Leonas Kaščenevskis
1937 m. Spalių m. 30 d.
№ 198.-
Panevėžys

Translation from Lithuanian

Seminary of Rabbis /Kneset Israel/ Kaunas Viliampolė. 1937 June the 1 day. No. 77.----------

C E R T I F I C A T E .

Hereby we certify that the Rabbi Wolfas Kuznecas has been learning without breaking off in our semina of Rabbis from the end of the year 1920 till 1933 October the 1 day. The Rabbi Kuznecas has passed the curses of our seminary and has distingushed himself all the time as an honest ma of a pious disposition and as of the best demeanour. The Rabbi A. Sheras the Director /signature/. Manager /signature/. Seal of the seminary Kneset Israel.----------

Panevėžys,1937 metų spalių mėnesio 30 d. Rejestro Nr.: 198
Panevėžys,1937.X.30 day. Register No.: 198

Aš,Leonas Kaščenevskis,Panevėžio Apygardos Teismo Vertėjas,
I,Leonas Kaščenevskis,Sworn Translator of the District Court

turįs savo kontorą Panevėžyje,Kranto gatvė 47 Nr.,p.V.Kuzneco prašomas,
of Panevėžys,having an Office in Panevėžys,Kranto str.No.47,at request

šiuo tikrinu šio lietuvių į anglų kalbą vertimo tikrumą.
of the citizen W.Kuznecas,certify the conformity of the English translation with the original in Lithuanian.

ŽYMINIS
2 2
LITU
ŽENKLAS

T. M. Panevėžio Apygardos Teismo Vertėjas Leonas Kaščenevskis

L. Kaščenevski
Teismo Vertėjas

Translation from Hebrew.

Slaughterer and circumciser F. Zagorie Kaunas-Slabada, Veliuonos g-ve 4 /Lietuva Lithuania/. With Gods help in the year 5693/1933/in the month Menachem-Abo the 23. ----------

I hereby declare the following truth to all our bretheren children of Israel where ever they may reside, that the distinguished Rabbi of pious disposition, Mr. Wolf, son of Israel-Zvi Kuznetz, came to us to learn the holy work of initiating Jewish children into the covenant of our progenitor Abraham. /circumcision/. During the time of his learning this holy work he has perfectly performed the operation of cutting and uncovering the membrane/Chituch and Preyah/ many times, and from his hand there has not occured any unsatisfactory circumcision, therefore we present him with this certificate to publicly declare that he can be relied upon to be given Jewish children to initiate them in the covenant of our progenitor Abraham. May God give him success, and happy will be the congregation which shall appoint him to this holy work. ----------

I hereby undersign myself on the above mentioned day in the above mentioned Town./Signature/slaughterer and circumciser./Seal of Sh.Zagorie/

Translation from Hebrew.

The Rabbi A. V. Heleras Marijampole /Lithuania/

The distinguished and erudite scholar Rabbi Wolf, son of Izrael-Zvi, Kuznetz who is renowed for his knowledge in the Talmud, and pious disposition appeared before me and asked me to examine him in order to confer upon him the title of Rabbi. The above mentioned scholar is personaly known by me to be an erudite and sageous scholar; he became thoroughly versed in the Talmud and in the Jewish Codex during the time of his studying in the Holy Jeshiva Kneset Isroel Slabodka.- Even while he was attending the Jeshiva I recognised him to be one of the foremost and most progressive student, propounding and commentating the Rabbinical discourses in a profound and logical manner worthy of a Jewish Rabbi. Therefore I determine that all such should be titled Rabbi; and that he shall decide in Ritual questions and judge in civil cases, and that his decisions shall be as binding as those of other authoritive Rabbis. Happy will be the congregation who will appoint this great Rabbi as their leader, as he is a lovable person and esteemed by all, they will surely be contented. With Gods blessings he shall become one of the most foremost Rabbis. I hereby undersign myself expressing my esteem and honour to the Talmud and her Scholars. In the year 5693/1933/ in the month of Nison the 9th day Wednesday. /Signature of the Rabbi of Mariampole/ /Seal of the Rabbi of Mariampole./

TRANSLATION FROM LITHUANIAN.

Seminary of Rabbis /Kneset Israel/ Kaunas Villiampole.

1937 June 1 day. No. 77....

CERTIFICATE.

Hereby we certifiy that the Rabbi Wolfas Kuznecas has been learning without breaking off in our seminary of Rabbis from the end of the year 1920 till 1933 October the 1 day. The Rabbi Kuznecas has passed the courses of our seminary and has distinguished himself all the time as an honest man of a pious disposition and as of the best demeanour. The Rabbi A Shera the Director/ Signature/. Manager/ Signature. Seal of the seminary Kneset Israel.

APPENDIX IV

Die Tzikele

DIE TZIKELE

Chorus

Die tzikele, die tzikele
Hert ois a vois a vonim
Der votter hot batzolt far ir
Tvei guilden mezumonim
Chad Gadya, chad gadya

A meise mit a tzikele
Het ois a vois a vonim
Der votter hot batzolt var ir
Tvei guilden meizumonim
Die umshuldike tzikele
Zi sprinkt arrum in hoif
Plutzling kumt a beize katz
Un chupt un vressed ir oif

Chorus

Der hoont is doch beiz un shlecht
Dos treft doch al piroif
Er chapt die katz un fressed ir oif
Un macht foon ir a soif
Der hoont is dog dem shtecken vert
Er is doch beiz un schlecht
Der shtecken git em a klep vi bob
Un meint er is gerecht

Chorus

Der shtecken maint az doz vet
Endeken dem tzoren
Der shtecken falt in fire arein
Un is varbrent gevoren
Der wasser gliecht dem fire nit
Zei zeine nit kein por
Der vasser ringelt dem fire aroom en aroom
Un lest em ois biz gor

Chorus

Der ox varshteit kein chochmas nit
Zain kop is nog in moggen
Er gait tzum vasser un trink em ois
Vi er hott im vos tzum zoggen
Der shochet git mit a chalef a fier
Foon ox is nit gevoren
Die shochet maint as yeder ox
Is tzum chalef geboren

Chorus

Die shochet hott dos altz geton
Nit oif kat-ovess
Er hot alein mit zien lebben batzolt
Dem Malach Ha-moves
Un Gott der har hot bashlossen
Dem umrecht tzu fardarben
Un der vos macht a tzveiten dem toit
Mooz alein shtarben

Chorus